Palestinian Refugees

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Mythology, Identity, and the Search for Peace

Robert Bowker

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To my darling wife, Jenny,
to my late parents, Winsome and Athol Bowker,
and to my late brother, Bill, with love

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Acknowledgments

Though largely written while I was serving as an Australian public servant and diplomat, this book does not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian government. As a former official of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), I should add that the views expressed are not necessarily shared by UNRWA or the United Nations. This book and, of course, its shortcomings are my responsibility alone.

It is difficult intellectually, emotionally, and empirically—for observers and participants alike—to distinguish between myths and realities in the Arab-Israel conflict. The struggle between the national myths of Israelis and Palestinians is a conflict between two very compelling sets of values and aspirations. It touches individuals, on both sides, in very personal ways. I have nothing but admiration for those individuals—many of whom are close personal friends—who are seeking, with great integrity and with profound personal commitment, an enduring and just peace in the region. Where I have put forward ideas in this book on how change could happen, or might be encouraged to happen, I do so with a profound sense of humility.

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Bits, the Bowker family cat, remained true to his Beit Hanina origins, despite his exile and resettlement in Canberra. He contributed moral support occasionally.

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* * *

While every effort has been made to identify public sources for the information and comments in this book, I have also drawn on the advice and views of a number of individuals who would prefer to have their comments treated as confidential. That wish has been respected.

—Robert Bowker

I Am from There

I come from there and remember,
I was born like everyone was born, I have a mother and a house with many windows,
I have brothers, friends and a prison.
I have a wave that seagulls snatched away.
I have a view of my own and an extra blade of grass.
I have a moon past the peak of words.
I have the godsent food of birds and an olive tree beyond the ken of time.
I have traversed the land before swords turned bodies into banquets.
I come from there. I return the sky to its mother when for its mother the sky cries, and I weep for the returning cloud to know me.
I have learnt the words of blood-stained courts in order to break the rules.
I have learnt and dismantled all the words to construct a single one: Home

—*Mahmoud Darwish,* translated by Tania Nasir

Palestinian Refugees

Introduction

A nation is a group of people united by a mistaken view about the past and a hatred of their neighbours.

—Ernest Renan

If [we] are ever to gain a modicum of control over international reality, we will need to include in our studies how people's perceptions, meanings and values are shaped and changed, as it is only by changing other people's views that our own ideas may transform reality.

—Dominique Jacquin, Andrew Oros, and Marco Verweij, "Culture in International Relations"

Notions of identity bear heavily on the capacity of Israelis and the Palestinians to resolve their historical conflict. This book examines the role of memories and mythologies in Palestinian society and politics, particularly in regard to Palestinian refugees, and the challenges that issues of identity pose to building a secure and sustainable peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

My focus is one of the primary and seemingly more intractable dilemmas of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, wherein external parties have not succeeded in reshaping the political environment between the two sides. I will also examine the impact of Palestinian refugee mythologies on an important regional institution, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). For over five decades UNRWA has been the key United Nations agency dealing with Palestinian refugees.

The analytical concerns addressed in this book fall under two general headings. In the first instance, study of how Palestinian refugee memories and mythologies are affected by political developments raises the wider question of whether political mythologies, in the Palestinian refugee context at least, are susceptible to change or to being overtaken by new priorities. It leads to the question of whether such mythologies can coexist with approaches that, in important respects, seek to ignore or to contradict them.

Second, analyzing Palestinian political mythologies and UNRWA in general involves examination of Palestinian refugee society, history, and politics; the relationship between those matters and perceptions of the Palestinian political leadership; perceptions of the objectives of host governments and donor countries supporting UNRWA; and the role of UNRWA itself.[1] Consideration of the relationship between Palestinian refugees and

UNRWA, particularly during times of financial crisis in that organization, provides insights into the underlying political dynamics of the Middle East. It helps us to understand the constraints that political imperatives, ambiguities, and dilemmas impose on governments.

Why, it may be asked, are these issues important? The answer lies in the argument I have made elsewhere, that is, to achieve security with others, rather than against others, Middle East leaders will be required to involve their audiences in painful processes of historical compromise. Achieving durable security through such processes is more than a matter of understanding the interests and interaction of states; it also requires mutual understanding of the ways in which leaderships, both Israeli and Palestinian, view the world, themselves, and each other.[2]

Underlying this book is the contention that for processes of conflict resolution to be a sustainable part of peace between Israelis and Palestinians, ways will have to be found to deal with complex questions of identity in which real or imagined memory plays a major part. Competing aspirations and ideas of legitimacy that are at the heart of the political mythologies of Israelis and Palestinians alike will need to be addressed. Efforts to introduce practical or philosophical changes in approach to matters of such deep political sensitivity among Palestinians as the refugee issue and the future of UNRWA must recognize and relate effectively to the relationship between mythologies and power that is at the core of Palestinian political life.

This book may hopefully contribute—through developing insight into the role of Palestinian political mythologies among the many aspects of peacebuilding—to the achievement of durable outcomes from the search for security. In a region that is as impoverished in terms of security as it is rich in memories and mythologies, at least this would be a small step forward.

The political mythologies and memories of Palestinian refugees in which UNRWA is deeply embedded—along with associated issues of identity, aspiration, and political frustration—are central elements in Palestinian politics. As will be explained, Palestinian refugees whose education and health services are provided by UNRWA are not merely recipients of international aid. Viewed in terms of the historical conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, the relationship of the refugees to UNRWA has been instrumental in forging their sense of identity as refugees, their claims for justice, and their perceptions of the role and responsibilities of other parties relevant to their situation and aspirations.

Those factors—and, as I will discuss, the gap between changing political realities and refugee aspirations—were of fundamental importance to their responses to the political developments under the Oslo process from 1993 onward. Refugees regarded that process, and a major financial crisis that arose for UNRWA in 1997, as a threat to the embodiment, in the form of UNRWA, of the mythologies central to their aspirations and identity. I will suggest that there are lessons to be drawn from this contention for the

management of the refugee issue in the broader context of the Middle East peace process, and for the future of UNRWA.

Beliefs, be they Palestinian or Israeli, are in a fundamental sense not negotiable. Interests, however, may be balanced and negotiated. The priorities accorded to both interests and the active pursuit of particular beliefs may be changed, although seeking deliberately to achieve such an outcome is likely to be politically demanding. Those who seek to achieve a durable solution to the refugee issue through negotiation, compromise, or adjustment of political mythology on the Palestinian refugee side confront the probably insurmountable task of adjusting the foundation identity of Palestinian refugees and their origins in family and place. Barring the politically unforeseeable, the key—and potentially achievable—political challenge, on the Palestinian side, will be to shift the focus of refugees away from one set of rights—involving deeply held beliefs about their right to return to a former homeland—in favor of a focus, without prejudice to their existing mythologies, on future rights of security, citizenship, and the promise of a life with dignity.

On the Israeli side, efforts to encourage Palestinian refugees to accept the pain of territorial compromise will need to be matched by efforts among Israelis to confront their own past, and to understand Palestinian perceptions of the injustice done to them. Israelis will need to develop approaches with the Palestinian leadership that may, over time, defuse the refugee issue among the majority of Palestinians without jeopardizing the Jewish identity of Israel. And that approach has to be sold, somehow, to a nervous and deeply skeptical political audience.

For a variety of political, social, and institutional reasons, there has been a dearth of leadership on the Palestinian side prepared to shape and share a vision for the future of Palestinian refugees and UNRWA that might provide an acceptable alternative to the continuation of existing mythologies. The enormity of the task of changing such mythologies was underlined by the financial crisis in UNRWA in 1997, detailed in Chapter 7.

Developments in Palestinian politics during the 1990s, and the 1997 crisis in UNRWA, showed essentially that the parties involved were captive to the ideological stasis of Palestinian politics. All of the relevant actors found it easier to perpetuate the mythologies central to Palestinian refugee identity than to begin challenging them by altering elements of the political and institutional status quo. Events since the end of 2000 have of course made the prospects for bridging the gaps between Palestinians and Israelis even more remote.

Approach

There is a growing recognition in academic circles of the potency of political mythology in encounters between Palestinians and Israelis, and therefore

of the importance of taking mythologies into account in analysis of Palestinian and Israeli political behavior. On the Israeli side, most notably, Yael Zerubavel has made a detailed study of the role of collective memory and the "narrativization" of those memories as a mobilizing force. Zerubavel stresses the role of commemorative narratives and rituals in establishing an overall sense of continuity of collective memory and in providing moral messages while making it possible to introduce new interpretations of the past. These collective memories of recovered roots, she argues, became a driving force in the Zionist experience for change and a means of articulating new values and ideas.[3]

On the Palestinian side, Yezid Sayigh, while comprehensively documenting the historical record of the Palestinian nationalist movement, has eloquently investigated Palestinian political culture and history using mythology as a key conceptual focus. Sayigh has described how acts of armed struggle and the conflicts that came about in the period from 1965 onward contributed to the formation of a Palestinian identity.

The idea, myth, illusion, and psychological impact of armed struggle provided, according to Sayigh, the necessary mobilizing theme for the Palestinians and their instrument of liberation. It was, in his words, "the defining dynamic that drove the reconstruction and reorganisation of Palestinian national politics, and that allowed the search for [statehood] to proceed."[4] In short, according to Sayigh, the process of focusing on the mythology of armed struggle as a galvanizing and unifying factor, and on the heroic imagery and language of armed struggle, gave new substance to the imagined community of the Palestinians. It created a state framework around which nationalism could develop.[5]

Consideration of the dynamics of power and resource distribution have also shaped key studies of Palestinian politics and society, although there have been suggestions that in some cases political and ideological considerations may have limited the depth and critical quality of such studies.[6] In his landmark discussion of the notion of neopatrimonialism, Rex Brynen focused on the interaction of domestic concerns, including resource distribution, as well as external influences on the decisionmaking process within the Palestinian Authority. Writing in 1995, Brynen made the point that despite the transfer of many millions of dollars each year to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) after the intifada began, books on the intifada typically devoted less than 1 percent of their analysis to the importance of patronage and external resource flows within Palestinian nationalist politics.[7] He suggested that political considerations may have caused the exploration of patronage in modern Palestinian politics to be both theoretically and empirically weak.[8]

Sara Roy's and Amira Hass's respective analyses and observations of the socioeconomic and political situation in Gaza, Maya Rosenfeld's study

of Dheisheh camp near Bethlehem, and Randa Farah's study of refugees in Jordan have provided insights into the contemporary Palestinian refugee political and social environment from a grassroots perspective. Their analyses are enriched by extensive use of interviews, and backed by a strong analytical focus upon the internal dynamics and contradictions of Palestinian society at various levels.[9]

Other analysts, who often have focused on Palestinians in general rather than on Palestinian refugees in particular, have preferred more historical approaches. Rashid Khalidi has emphasized the authenticity and continuity of the political struggle of the Palestinian nationalist movement.[10] Glenn Robinson and Graham Usher focus their respective studies on the tensions between the nation-building orientation of the Palestinian Authority under Yasser Arafat and the political and social legacy of the intifada.[11] Some Israeli historians—Benny Morris and Simha Flapan prominent among them—earlier indirectly complemented such analyses by addressing, with a critical eye, the founding myths surrounding the creation of Israel. Their work has played a part in substantiating significant elements of the Palestinian counternarrative of that period and its meaning for Palestinian society.[12]

My approach follows to some extent the general direction taken by Yezid Sayigh, in that it highlights political dynamics and the importance of political mythology in understanding Palestinian refugee politics, including the 1997 events. I add to Yezid Sayigh's approach a more specific focus on the particular dynamics that applied between Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, and external actors in the 1990s. I also make occasional comparative reference to Zionist experience with the use of political mythology, so as to bring into sharper focus the specific character of the challenges faced by Arafat and the Palestinian Authority.

Though informed in a broad sense by the insights and assumptions of various scholars concerning culture and identity, this book will not seek to develop a sophisticated theoretical framework for the analysis of the political, social, and institutional dynamics surrounding UNRWA, such as Martha Finnemore has produced in regard to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).[13] It would not be possible to describe adequately the political complexity of recent developments in regard to UNRWA, or their social, historical, and political context, in a work of this length and yet still undertake the development and defense of a theoretical framework of sufficient intellectual rigor to add much value to the study. I recognize, however, that to be cleared conceptually for takeoff, and to integrate systematically the many parts of this analysis, there needs to be at least some rudimentary theoretical underpinning to this exercise as a whole.

In writing this book I was also conscious of the concern expressed by Jeffrey Checkel that constructivist approaches tend to lack a theory of

agency, emphasizing the role of social structures and norms at the expense of the forces that help to create and change them.[14] The empirical material presented here perhaps makes a modest contribution to understanding, at least in this specific context, the part played by mythologies and identity in shaping the role of a significant international organization. However, the book does not provide much solace to those who would like to see a stronger focus on the agents of change, except perhaps in the suggestions it advances concerning ways of empowering Palestinian refugees.

The thematic core of this book lies in its consideration of the extent to which choices at both the state and the individual level are constrained by global norms and normative values specific to certain societies or social units—in this case, Palestinian refugees—as well as material interests and social structures. It also provides a range of insights, not only into the effects of culture on perceptions of interests, community, and identity, but also into the political and other means through which institutions such as UNRWA help to shape identities and are shaped by them.

Chapter 1 elaborates on the notions of mythologies, memories, and political culture, and outlines the conceptual framework within which those phenomena will be explored in the Palestinian context. Issues addressed include the relationship between power and mythology, and the impact of stress upon the receptivity of audiences to messages from peers and leaders, respectively. Chapter 2 relates these concepts to some of the key elements of Palestinian political culture by reviewing the impact of interaction with Israel on political mythologies in the Palestinian context. It also discusses elitism, neopatrimonialism, and the impact of the first intifada on Palestinian political culture and later political developments. It highlights the weakness of communication and trust between the Palestinian political leadership and its audience.

To establish the context in which refugee political mythologies are located, Chapter 3 examines the social and political situation of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, and also in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Chapter 4 then outlines core Palestinian refugee mythologies in some detail, while Chapter 5 discusses the place of UNRWA in those mythologies.

The book then turns to an examination of the relationship between mythology and institutions and events. Discussing further the complex relationship between power and mythology in Palestinian society, Chapter 6 examines the tensions between the Palestinian pursuit of nationalist political agendas through the Oslo process, on the one hand, and the ongoing popular appeal of refugee mythologies, on the other. It highlights the implications for the Palestinian Authority of refugee disquiet over the direction of the Oslo process so far as their interests were concerned.

Chapter 7 addresses the question of structures and agents of change in the refugee context through describing the steps taken by UNRWA in 1997

to address its critical financial situation, and the responses by various parties to those developments. It notes the ways in which, during the crisis, mythology was drawn upon to mobilize political opinion and to stimulate responses in defense of the status quo. That was the case not only among refugees and host governments but also, ultimately, among the Western donor community. Western donor countries generally proved more readily persuaded to address the immediate financial crisis facing UNRWA than did their Arab donor-country counterparts. Among the latter, perceptions of the refugee issue—including the mythologies associated with it—were affected by a range of practical and political concerns to which UNRWA had difficulty relating effectively.

In conclusion, Chapter 8 seeks to assess the capacity of the Palestinian leadership, Israel, and the international community to deal constructively with Palestinian refugee political mythologies in the search for peace. It emphasizes the importance of building a new sense of certainty and empowerment alongside existing refugee mythologies if the refugee issue is to be dealt with effectively in a renewed peace process, and if the role played by UNRWA is to be altered. It makes some suggestions concerning how the way ahead might be approached, for building peace and for the future of UNRWA, and discusses the circumstances under which change might occur.

An important disclaimer needs to be made at the outset of this book. Not least because of the unpredictability of the present political situation in the region, this book cannot and does not claim to present, under a general heading of contemporary Palestinian political culture, an authoritative picture of the evolving nature of Palestinian collective memory and political mythologies. Use has been made of several of the fairly limited number of publications on Palestinian society, particularly refugee society, which emerged during the 1990s. It remains difficult, however, to comment meaningfully about Palestinian society in very general terms.

Like other Arab societies, different elements of Palestinian society display wide variations in social status, educational attainment, economic security, and political awareness. Individual refugees, who are largely treated as a collective entity in this work, can be expected to respond differently to particular events and images, according to personal experience and real and imagined memories. They remain subject to the specific effects of gender, location, social status, peer-group pressures, and a range of other influences. Palestinian experience has been so diverse that it defies a single narrative.[15]

At the individual level, moreover, the Arab world since the 1990s—and most recently in the context of the toppling of the regime of Saddam Hussein—has been experiencing a degree of intellectual and political trauma that has perhaps not been equaled since the awakening of modern Arab nationalism and the upsurge of Jewish immigration to Mandate Palestine

after World War I. We are witnessing, in the words of Fouad Ajami, "a great unsettling of things, a deep Arab malady."[16]

Evidence of strain is abundant in private discourse and in the public media where issues of identity surface.[17] Among many Palestinians, there is a drive to fulfill the unmet potential of a community that has experienced—and continues to bear—a heavy burden of deprivation and human suffering. Whether that potential will be realized, and the implications of the answer to that question for the future shape of Palestinian political culture, remain to be seen.

It also needs to be emphasized that in the Middle East there are often many versions of the truth. Perceptions, issues of identity, and aspirations are intimately related. The deeper one digs into the background of any particular issue or event in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the more likely one is to find contradictory explanations or interpretations. The purpose of this book is not to judge the respective merits of competing mythologies and memories. My objective, rather, is to examine their impact on the prospects for resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their implications for the longer-term outlook for the Palestinian refugee issue and for UNRWA.

Notes

Chapter-opening epigraphs are from the following sources: Ernest Renan, quoted in Avi Shlaim, "Israel and the Arab Coalition in 1948," in Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 79; and Dominique Jacquin, Andrew Oros, and Marco Verweij, eds., "Culture in International Relations: An Introduction to the Special Issue," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 22, no. 3 (1993), p. 375.

1. Host governments, also referred to as "host authorities," are those that "host" substantial numbers of Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA, namely Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is treated in a similar fashion to host governments by UNRWA, being included in regular consultative and information-sharing meetings, including twice-yearly gatherings known as "Informal Meetings of Major Donors and Host Governments." The PLO is also an observer at meetings of UNRWA Advisory Commission (ADCOM).

2. Robert Bowker, *Beyond Peace: The Search for Security in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996), pp. 187–190.

3. Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 6–8.

4. Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1997), p. 23.

5. Ibid., pp. vii, 665.

6. Salim Tamari, in an overview of research activity by Palestinian and international social scientists following the Israeli occupation, has acknowledged that much of that research suffered from the absence of a critical perspective. Writing ten

years after the outbreak of the first intifada in December 1987, he noted that a critical overview of those events had yet to be written. Whereas in Tamari's view the output of commissioned research and visiting scholars have also demonstrated serious shortcomings, he observed that writings by local sociologists since 1991 politically resonated with, and sometimes subordinated themselves to the needs and priorities of, the national movement. Salim Tamari, "Social Science Research in Palestine," in Riccardo Bocco, Blandine Destremau, and Jean Hannoyer, eds., *Palestine, Palestiniens: Territoire national, espaces communautaires* (Amman: Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain [CERMOC], 1997), pp. 29–31.

7. Brynen points out that not a single article devoted explicitly to the question of patron-clientalism in the modern Palestinian nationalist movement was published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* between 1988 and the end of 1994. Rex Brynen, "The Neopatrimonial Dimension of Palestinian Politics," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 1 (Autumn 1995), pp. 29–30.

8. Brynen also observed that because of the difficulty of securing detailed and systematic data on resource manipulation in maintaining social control in Palestine, neopatrimonialism was "more often noted than explored." Ibid., p. 27.

9. Sara Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-Development* (Washington, DC: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1995); Amira Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza: Days and Nights in a Land Under Siege,* translated by Elana Wesley and Maxine Kaufman-Lacusta (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996); Maya Rosenfeld, "Power Structure, Agency, and Family in a Palestinian Refugee Camp," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 3 (August 2002), pp. 519–551; Randa Farah "Crossing Boundaries: Reconstruction of Palestinian Identities in Al-Baq'a Refugee Camp, Jordan," in Bocco, Destremau, and Hannoyer, *Palestine, Palestiniens,* pp. 259–298.

10. Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

11. Glenn E. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Graham Usher, *Palestine in Crisis: The Struggle for Peace and Political Independence After Oslo* (London: Pluto Press in association with Transnational Institute [TNI] and Middle East Research and Information Project [MERIP], 1995).

12. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Simha Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians, 1917–1947* (London: Croon Helm, 1979).

13. Though written from an international relations perspective, Martha Finnemore's study provides a stimulating constructivist analysis of the impact of internationally held norms and values, including those promoted by organizations such as UNESCO. Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). See especially her theoretical discussion of structures versus agents (pp. 14–22) and the application of that framework to UNESCO (pp. 34–66). See also Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics* 50 (January 1998), pp. 324–348.

14. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn," p. 325.

15. Edward Said, "On Palestinian Identity: A Conversation with Salman Rushdie (1986)," in Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969–1994* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p. 119.

16. Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), pp. 3, 123–124.

17. See, for example, Emile Nakhleh, "The Arab World After the Gulf War: Challenges and Prospects," in Elise Boulding, ed., *Building Peace in the Middle East: Challenges for States and Civil Society* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), pp. 111–120; and Ahmad Shboul, "Arab Society and Culture: Burdens of the Past, Challenges of the Future," *Voices* (National Library of Australia) 3, no. 2 (Winter 1993).

1

Political Mythologies in the Palestinian Context

So how much myth is good for us? And how can we measure the dosage? Should we avoid the stuff altogether for fear of contamination or dismiss it out of hand as sinister and irrational esoterica that belong only in the unsavory margins of "real" (to wit, our own) history? Or do we always have to ensure that a cordon sanitaire *of protective irony is always securely in place when discussing such matters? . . .*

The real problem . . . is whether it is possible to take myth seriously on its own terms, and to respect its coherence and complexity, without becoming morally blinded by its poetic power; . . . of how to reproduce the "other," separated from us by space, time or cultural customs, without either losing ourselves altogether in total immersion or else rendering the subject "safe" by the usual eviscerations of Western empirical analysis.

Of one thing at least I am certain: that not to take myth seriously . . . is actually to impoverish our understanding of our shared world. And it is also to concede the subject by default to those who have no critical distance from it at all, who apprehend myth not as a historical phenomenon but as an unchallengeable perennial mystery.

—Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*

Until political leaders have transformed the political environment between Palestinians and Israelis, negotiators will be unable to narrow the gap between competing fears and aspirations. Without an effective political process, negotiated agreements, even though they may be sound in a technical sense, are unlikely to be implemented in full, or they may have unintended consequences.[1] Those who pursue regional security without dealing with the core political issues between Israel and the Palestinians, including settlements, refugees, and Jerusalem, will be condemned, like Coleridge's ancient mariner, to seek but not to find either peace or security.

In addition to the insights derived from interests-based analysis of political behavior between states, understanding the relationship between governing institutions and societies within states is of critical importance to

the development of regional security regimes.[2] Palestinian refugee political mythologies have played such a significant part in shaping the environment in which Palestinian politics are conducted and regional security is pursued that analysis of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict would be deficient without an appreciation of the mythological dimensions of the Palestinian situation. In his review of Western art, society, and the environment, Simon Schama has suggested the need for mythology to be acknowledged and dealt with in achieving an understanding of the "real" world.[3] This book generally supports that view in the Palestinian-Israeli context.

At the most general level of consideration, assumptions concerning the rationality of the behavior of states carry with them a host of further assumptions about the internal dynamics of those states. Palestinians and Israelis alike are entangled, in David Shipler's eloquent words, in each other's fears.[4] In making assumptions about domestic politics in this situation, there is a risk of imposing Western frameworks on other peoples' conceptions of their own culture and history.[5] Particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian refugee context, assumptions that do not take full account of the mobilizing power of mythology are highly questionable.

Rami Khouri has noted, perceptively, that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is about land, but that the issue of land captures concepts of identity, community, and nationhood, motivated by "fierce, ancient and primordial forces of human dignity, protection and survival, and expressed in the modern vocabulary of sovereignty, statehood and citizenship."[6] Such ethnonationalist discourses may appear, at times, to have little to do with interests-based approaches to decisionmaking or problem solving.[7]

In some quarters at least, the core issues dividing Palestinians and Israelis may ultimately prove to be concerns that others intend to realize their identity with the most minimal of concessions to the reality imposed by the existence of the other party, let alone the rights and needs of that party. But the relationship between mythologies and politics is complex, and operates at a variety of levels. It deserves to be studied systematically before conclusions are drawn about its consequences.

Mythologies

Mythologies are defined for the purpose of this book as narratives that shape collective consciousness and national-cultural identity and that seek to anchor the present in the past.[8] Because people need images that give meaning to the facts of ordinary life and assist them in organizing experience into social and cultural contexts, mythologies are an integral part of any society. And insofar as our constructions of self, moral order, and the

world are formed in collective life, their continued affirmation by the group is a necessary condition for securing personal identity.[9]

Mythologies are likely to be dynamic—in response to changing needs. They are also likely to be durable, because they are so closely linked to wider frameworks of understanding among individuals of their social and historical context. In contrast to the rationalist contention that ideas and principles confer meaning and order on social life, Emile Durkheim insists that a new faith cannot be rationally designed or artificially imposed upon a people but must emerge from the evolving unconscious collective life of society.[10] The durability of Palestinian mythologies supports that view.

Mythologies are also closely linked to perceptions of power and to processes of communication. They are shaped in some cases by personal experience and in most cases by collective memory. Their foundations may not be easily understood by others. Attempts to explain their basic elements are likely to be contested at a variety of levels, including on the basis of competing notions of equity and natural justice. Aspects of particular mythologies may be challenged, sometimes with considerable vigor and emotional intensity, within the societies from which they originate. Because mythologies are intimately linked to relationships expressed in terms of power, the conditions or processes under which those relationships change—including the manner in which changes affect the interests of key elements of societies—may affect mythologies as well.

Understanding the impact of mythologies on Palestinian refugees and, by extension, on dealings between Palestinians and Israelis therefore requires understanding of the political cultures of those societies. In particular, it requires study of their distribution of authority, their processes of communication, and the interaction between mythologies and the preservation or promotion of particular interests.

Mythologies and Memories

For the purposes of this book, mythologies and collective memories are assumed to be largely the same phenomena but with some differences. Collective memory has been described as the type of history carried around in the heads of ordinary people, rather than historical knowledge.[11] It may be shaped or reinforced by deeply meaningful memories of personal or familial experience. Where related to direct personal experience, memories are perhaps more likely than mythologies to be related to reality. This is not always the case, however, nor is individual memory necessarily a reliable guide to what has transpired. Indeed, Benny Morris found, in researching the origins of the Palestinian refugee experience, that

> while contemporary documents may misinform, distort, omit or lie, . . . interviewees recalling highly controversial events some 40 years ago . . . experience . . . enormous gaps of memory, the ravages of aging and time, and terrible distortions or selectivity, the ravages of accepted wisdom, prejudice and political beliefs and interests. . . . Only very, very rarely have I relied on oral history to establish facts.[12]

In her investigation of Palestinian refugee identities and memories in Jordan, Randa Farah also found that significant differences in oral narratives and life histories reflected the heterogeneity of Palestinian society. Farah observed that refugees were attempting to reposition fading nationalist symbols associated with camps and refugees to a central place in Palestinian discourse, accompanied by the articulation of previously submerged class issues.[13] Farah also found that differences were evident along gender lines, with women tending to be more outspoken than men on matters concerning the clashes between the Palestinian resistance movement and the Jordanian army in 1970–1971 and more critical of Jordanian policies.[14]

Collective memory is not necessarily a driving force for political activity, nor, in isolation, is personal experience. Both may remain latent political factors. When collective memories, real or imagined, and experiences are combined deliberately to mobilize energies in pursuit of particular political agendas, however, the result can be the creation or activation of political mythologies of considerable potency. While this book is focused mainly on Palestinian refugee political mythologies, and to some extent on the Zionist experience, it might be noted in passing that the political mythologies of other readily identifiable Middle East groups such as the Kurds, the Armenians, and the Maronites are no less strongly held and distinctive than those of Palestinian refugees and have arisen in similar circumstances of resistance to an external "other."[15]

The power of collective memory, as Yael Zerubavel has pointed out, does not lie in its accurate, systematic, or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance. She points out how the selective remembering and forgetting from one generation to another of collective memories was used to considerable effect in reconstructing Israel's national memories and traditions. That process involved both commemorations and popular narrative and ceremonial devices, and the interpretation, ordering, and deliberate suppression and elaboration of particular information or themes.[16]

Sigmund Freud has suggested that humans have a gift for historical memory and a cultural disposition to pass on myths, if not facts, between generations.[17] A leading scholar of religious symbolism, Jean C. Cooper, notes a connection between mythology and power. In her words, myths

> are the fundamental responses of people to their environment, to their existential situation and experiences as well as the embodiment of their

> longings; some are quasi-historical, others the response to religious beliefs and to cultural, psychological urges, both social and personal. They have been handed down by word of mouth, in rituals, festivals, religious drama and in literature, becoming a creative force, *perpetuating the powers of which they are an expression.*[18]

The insights of Freud and Cooper therefore place mythology, appropriately, in a political context. Stephanie Lawson, for example, has noted in regard to ethnonationalist movements generally that claims to legitimacy and sovereignty are often combined with a collective social memory that recalls past injustices and demands their rectification, especially when an injustice is seen to have laid the present foundations of what Lawson refers to as an "inauthentic" structure of sovereignty. Like the Pacific Islanders who are the subject of Lawson's studies, there is a need among Palestinians to "demonstrate authenticity in opposition to external dominating alternatives."[19]

Whether mythologies, including political mythologies, are necessarily harmful depends very much upon judgments about the uses to which mythologies are put, and perceptions of the outcomes of doing so. Recourse to the mobilizing power of mythologies may produce change in directions that some people desire, or it may foster resistance to change. Nor are mythologies necessarily demonstrably false. Indeed, the lack of empirical rigor that surrounds myths is not only typical of them, but also one of their essential qualities as a mobilizing device. Georges Sorel, in his discussion of the power of myths in labor strikes, makes the point that to have a mobilizing effect, the myth has to be mysterious and must not be broken down into its component parts. It must be "an organisation of images capable of evoking, *as a whole and solely by intuition* prior to any deliberate analysis [a] mass of sentiments. . . . Any discussion on the manner of applying [myths] materially is devoid of sense. *It is only the myth as a whole that counts*."[20]

Political mythologies, as Zerubavel's study underlines, naturally reflect ideology and political agendas—especially when used to provide legitimization for existing practices or to serve particular ideological interests. Mythologies and memories may be used deliberately as a mobilizing agent to galvanize commitment or identification with a cause or a nation-building process. The notion of memory as a source of legitimacy for political aspirations and action is common to Palestinians and Israelis alike.

The Zionist nationalist movement from Herzl onward, for example, would have had little prospect of success, even among Jewry in Europe, without harnessing such powerful myths as the ingathering of the exiled, the upbuilding of Zion as a model society, the creation of a new Hebrew or Jewish "type," and an overarching vision of national redemption.[21] When asked in 1919 why Jews had a right to Palestine, Chaim Weizmann replied "Memory is right."[22]

In a similar vein, the former deputy mayor Meron Benvenisti, for example, has criticized bias in the displays at the Tower of David Museum in the Old City of Jerusalem that convey to museum visitors that after the Israelite period, the city was occupied by "foreigners." Whereas the Israelite period lasted only 600 years, all the periods that followed it—Persian, Byzantine, Mameluke, Ottoman, and British—are represented as a chain of occupations. Only the Israeli-Jewish claim to the city is granted legitimacy, whereas the Arab connections to Jerusalem are firmly downplayed. According to Benvenisti the word *Arab* does not appear in the display, while the only Arabic name mentioned in the entire complex is that of the conqueror of the city, the caliph Omar. The history being presented, he says, is the "victor's version of history."[23]

In the case of the Palestinians, national aspirations have focused on more than outcomes or achievements—which have been fairly limited to date, despite the political profile the Palestinian issue has acquired. They attach particular importance to the political symbols and processes of ethnonationalist struggle and self-realization.[24] As will be discussed in greater detail later, collective Palestinian memories of dispossession, the intifada, and the mythology of struggle have provided natural corollaries to the Palestinian search for statehood.

Palestinian collective memories have developed, like those of Israelis, without much examination of the empirical validity of the historical claims and assumptions that underlie them, let alone the theological arguments on some issues.[25] The imagery embodied in collective memories has acquired such force that those beliefs are difficult to challenge, even when in some quarters they may be regarded as politically dysfunctional. But the rationality of politics in the Middle East is bounded by such societal perspectives and real or imagined memories and values just as much as it is shaped by events, personalities, shocks, and discontinuities.

Because mythologies usually seek to depict the achievements and the story of one's own group in positive terms, they have tended to encourage caution in regard to the possible motives and intentions of others. And in the Palestinian case, mythologies have set political benchmarks against which, for Palestinian refugees at least, the outcomes of the Middle East peace process since 1993 will be measured. As will be discussed, the prominence accorded to the refugee issue among efforts to find a negotiated solution to the outstanding differences between Israel and the Palestinians during the second half of 2000, and in early 2001, amply demonstrated the political potency of refugee demands.[26]

The strength of individual attachment to political mythologies will be affected by peer pressures, including among extended families and clans and within other institutionalized frameworks such as schools, mosques, synagogues, and churches, and among professional networks. In Palestinian

refugee society, as will also be discussed later, family affiliations and vestigial village networks continue to have particular importance.

The Manipulation of Memories and Mythologies

The driving force behind the deliberate use, perpetuation, and manipulation of political mythology by institutions is political, but the imagery also draws upon the desire of individuals for the comfort and familiarity of commemorative narratives. A key goal of the organizations and individuals promoting particular imagery—apart from acquiring, in the course of doing so, any material or other benefits that may flow from its manipulation—is the use of collective memory to construct a distinct national identity and culture.

Not least because the primary value of mythology among those who seek to draw upon it for political purposes lies in its ability to provide comfort—where that is possible—and reassurance to core audiences, the impact of the myth is likely to be a key concern among those who seek to preserve, commemorate, or otherwise reinforce it. Concern about its strictly factual accuracy may be less evident than the need to flatter the collective consciousness. It is therefore natural, and perhaps inevitable, that historical argument concerning such imagery will often move directly into the political domain.[27]

It is not, however, of great importance from a nation-building perspective whether, for example, the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Yasser Arafat, was at Karameh in Jordan during the celebrated battle with Israel in March 1968 (which became a pivotal event in the emergence of a new Palestinian political identity) or, as well-informed Jordanians claim, was having breakfast in the nearby town of Salt.[28] It does not matter much whether the Zionist political folk hero Yoseph Trumpeldor's last words on being told of his imminent demise following his mortal wounding in March 1920 at Tel Hai in the Galilee were: "It is good to die for one's country" or, as now recounted in jocular versions of the story, a colorful Russian expletive ("Fuck your mother") that sounds like a Hebrew sentence.[29] The imagery that serves political objectives best for individuals seeking a sense of identity and belonging to a place in history, and of being able to understand and to relate personal experience within wider social and political contexts, is what ultimately matters to the commemorative narrative.

Rashid Khalidi observes that in the Palestinian case, the narratives woven around crushing failures are largely devoid of recognition of political miscalculation and questioning of what Palestinians might have done differently, or more successfully, in the same historical circumstances.

Instead, according to Khalidi, there is a pattern of narration stressing heroism, and success in bringing together the Palestinian people. There is also a theme of betrayal by other parties—the British, Arab governments, and traditional Palestinian leaders in the case of the 1930s and 1940s; and in later years the perfidy of external parties and Arab regimes. The core of the narrative is for challenges to have been surmounted and survived, and for the process to be portrayed where possible as triumph, or at least as heroic perseverance against impossible odds.[30]

Khalidi observes that the retelling of Palestinian history downplayed the actuality at various times of disorganization, chaos, and errors of judgment by Palestinian leaders from the 1930s to the 1960s. At least until a counternarrative began to emerge after the catastrophe in Lebanon, it conveniently absolved the PLO leadership from their own responsibilities for failure. He cites as examples, among others, the failure of the armed rebellion of 'Iz al-Din al-Qassam in 1935; the failure of the 1936–1939 revolt against the British; the defeat at the hands of the Jewish forces in 1947–1949; the Palestinian debacle in Jordan in September 1970; the entanglement of the PLO in the Lebanese civil war in 1975–1976; and the expulsion of Palestinian forces from Lebanon and the massacres that followed in 1982.[31] Skepticism or worse about the leadership's record has not hindered the propagation of the official mythology through the Palestinian print and broadcast media. But it has also contributed, as discussed in more detail below, to a culture of cynicism at the popular level.

The Israeli experience has some parallels to that of the Palestinians. Israeli political mythology has traditionally accorded the Zionist movement a track record of ongoing success in pursuing and later defending core political objectives, including the creation and securing of a nation-state against overwhelming odds.[32] In describing how memory is transformed within the historical record and tradition is drawn upon selectively in interpretation of the past, Zerubavel examines how a battle (Tel Hai) in which several settlers died and the remainder fled became a myth of successful defense and a symbol of "no retreat." Looking further to the past, she describes how Bar Kokhba, the leader of a revolt that was defeated, is remembered as a legendary hero who led the Jewish people to freedom. Masada, a historical episode that supposedly ends with a collective suicide, is transformed into a myth of fighting to the bitter end, and of national renewal.[33]

In contrast to the mythological images of the 1948 struggle against invading Arab armies, revisionist interpretations of the Arab-Israeli conflict by the so-called new historians now hold that the Arab coalition facing Israel in 1947–1948 was far from monolithic, did not agree on its war aims, and was unable to coordinate its diplomatic and military moves. Throughout most of the conflict, moreover, Israel had the military edge over its Arab adversaries. Most important, Israel's leaders were aware of the divisions

inside the Arab coalition and fully exploited these divisions in waging the war and in extending the borders of their state.[34] However, the revisionist approach has been vigorously and often passionately contested by some other Israeli historians, such as Ephraim Karsh,[35] and there has been ongoing political resistance to efforts to amend the historical record regarding the conflict.

For many Israelis, and for many of their external supporters, the conclusions drawn by the revisionist historians were unacceptable, not least because the traditional portrayal of the emergence of Israel through the determination and heroism of the Jewish fighters facing a monolithic, well-armed, and implacably hostile Arab adversary corresponded to the collective memory of the Israeli generation who fought in 1948.

Beyond that concern, however, and after allowing for reasonable debate over the academic merit of some publications, it appeared that at least some of the energy of the efforts to discredit the work of historians such as Benny Morris and Avi Shlaim may have reflected a felt need to prevent the undermining of the core national narrative.[36] A new textbook—observing that, on nearly every front and in nearly every battle, the Jewish side had the advantage in terms of planning, organization, operation of equipment, and the availability of trained fighters—was condemned as "an act of moral suicide that deprives our children of everything that makes people proud of Israel."[37] There was especially strong resistance to the portrayal of Israeli history from a Palestinian perspective. Ariel Sharon, for example, complained at the time that an Israeli television documentary series on the events of 1948, *Tekumma,* "distort[ed] the history of our redemption, abandoning every moral basis for the establishment and existence of the state of Israel."[38]

The controversy between Israeli and Arab advocates has probably been as much about the nature of Zionism as about what happened in 1948. In the words of Benny Morris:

> If the Arab contention is true—that the *Yishuv* [Jewish community in Palestine] had always intended forcible "transfer" and that in 1948 it had systematically and forcibly expelled the Arab population from the areas that became the Jewish state—then Zionism is a robber ideology and Israel a robber state. If, on the other hand, one accepts that the refugee exodus was essentially the result of the war, and that the war was the handiwork of the Arabs, that the Palestinian masses fled by and large "voluntarily" or at the behest of their leaders, then Israel emerges free of what some have called original sin.[39]

During the 1990s even the quasi-sacred historical myths that were associated with Israel's nation-building process—such as Masada, the Bar Kochba revolt, and the defense of Tel Hai mentioned above—were sometimes joked about, but were rarely openly challenged. They may no longer have had the

functional value as mobilizing myths that once made them enthusiastically promoted within Israel. Their historical accuracy in some cases (notably Masada) had long been doubted.[40] Politically, however, it remained far easier to leave such mythologies undisturbed, despite public suspicions in Israel about the intentional fabrication of national traditions, and growing skepticism and cynicism in relation to state-sponsored commemorative activities.[41]

Mythologies are also not necessarily valued in terms of the wisdom they demonstrate, although wisdom may be displayed by participants, or a range of other virtues or qualities may be ascribed to them within the narrative. To those with greater critical distance from the issue, at least, the gun and olive branch imagery used by Yasser Arafat in addressing the UN General Assembly in 1974 was not likely to be productive among Western audiences, whatever resonance it may have had elsewhere. The military-option imagery, though arguably significant in creating and sustaining a Palestinian national consciousness, could be of no positive practical consequence in terms of securing political objectives in regard to Israel. Indeed Arafat, on telling President Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia that he was going to carry a gun and an olive branch to deliver his 1974 speech, was reportedly advised by Bourguiba that it would be wiser to leave the gun behind and carry two olive branches instead.[42]

Arafat's populist approach in 1974 was bound to be problematic, if not irreconcilable, with his strategic interest in securing support for Palestinian concerns in the U.S.-sponsored peace process and placing Palestinian statehood on the negotiating agenda. Nor was it of significant help in creating political support for the PLO in Arab capitals. Such considerations about the appropriateness and wider consequences of the self-contradicting imagery used on that occasion—if they were reflected upon at all—did not, however, deflect Arafat from his approach. The political image Arafat was seeking to project pragmatically at the popular level derived value mainly from its symbolism, and Arafat's self-image probably reinforced that stance.[43] Ideological and symbolic consistency were not necessarily key concerns for Arafat, bearing in mind the view of senior PLO cadre Khaled al-Hassan that the Arafat-led PLO was "a revolution on a flying carpet."[44] And despite the PLO's strategic interest in seeking to develop closer relations with the United States, with Cold War concerns dominating U.S. thinking on the Middle East, there was little likelihood that a national liberation movement that employed violence against Israel would make headway in political cycles in Washington.

Mythologies and Change

Mythologies, it will be suggested here, are dynamic, albeit remarkably durable responses to the realities of daily life. Precisely how and why mythologies

change is not always clear, but the question is important because commitment to mythologies has implications for policy choices at leadership levels.

Some individuals possess greater critical distance from conventional intellectual frameworks than others. Some may be more concerned than others to establish or to verify the empirical evidence surrounding collective memories and mythologies. As noted above, the deconstruction of memories and mythologies can be highly controversial for Israelis and Palestinians alike. It may be seen to undermine or to erode confidence in both the political and deeper social needs that are served by the particular construction of a national past, and the associated visions of a mythical future.

Direct personal experience obviously has a profound impact upon perceptions of the other party and perhaps upon willingness to change. And it would seem reasonable to assume that where individuals have found practical benefit to flow from wider recognition and legitimization of their particular collective memories and mythologies, their resistance to alternative frameworks is also likely to be strengthened. The extent to which material considerations affected individual refugee perceptions of the 1997 UNRWA crisis, for example, is very difficult to estimate, but it was obviously an element shaping the refugee response to that situation.

Characteristically, mythologies seek to explain what has happened, and to provide a sense of historical, cultural, and political location, rather than seeking to articulate a vision of the future. They tend to support skepticism where change is proposed in directions that are not, in a sense, preordained. They are, in short, more likely to be retrospective than visionary phenomena.

It should not be assumed, of course, that changes in mythologies are invariably destined to enhance the collective good. The romantic, conquering vision from an Israeli nation-building perspective of the early Zionists and of the nationalist movement in Israel eventually produced mythologies, particularly among the secular and religious Right, about the appropriate nature and destiny of the Zionist state that were ultimately at odds with other, arguably more realistic and certainly more humane perceptions of Israel's national interests.

Most notably in that regard, much of the political success of the Jewish settler movement, which began after the 1967 Six Day War, came from its exploitation, in the euphoria following Israel's military victory, of the image of "reinhabiting" what one Israeli writer has described as a "mythic landscape, longed for in exile and won fairly in a war of survival."[45] Despite the fact that the use of such political and religious imagery for propaganda purposes could no longer be justified in terms of Israel's security interests, and despite the dangers it still poses to Israel's ability to develop in peace and security as a free and democratic society, it has proven impossible until now to reverse the situation on the ground.

The extent to which a political mythology may be linked through political processes to a sense of moral purpose should not be overlooked in

assessing the potency of mythologies among both domestic and external audiences. To be judgmental about the legitimacy of such approaches is of course to enter into a difficult domain of contending needs and aspirations. It can also lead to fruitless debate about what, if any, alternative approaches might have been possible in the historical circumstances at the time. So far as the Israeli-Palestinian situation is concerned, such issues are beyond the scope of this book.

Nevertheless, the notion of moral imperative being linked to mythologies has considerable implications for those who must make political choices and persuade others to follow their lead. Illustrating that point, Ze'ev Sternhell has argued that the Zionists were convinced of their *moral* right to acquire Arab land—because with the rise of Hitler from 1933, Palestine was their only refuge from persecution, especially with restrictive immigration laws in place in the United States and elsewhere in the 1920s and 1930s—and this approach was extraordinarily effective in mobilizing support at home and abroad. The alleged *historical* right to the land was, according to Sternhell, "merely a matter of politics and propaganda."[46]

Despite the combined strength of the factors that work toward acceptance of orthodox thinking and reinforcement of certain images, counternarratives do emerge from time to time, graduating from being labeled as merely oppositional criticisms. Some counternarratives have won acceptance as being more authoritative images than their predecessors. For example, as discussed below, the dominant mythologies of Israelis demonstrated increasing signs of uncertainty during the 1980s and 1990s as objective circumstances facing the nation changed. Questions were increasingly raised about the contemporary relevance of Zionism and other long-established Israeli perceptions of their situation.

That development, as well as the suggestion that in the earlier Zionist period Israelis used mythology effectively as an instrument of national political liberation while the Palestinians have continued to be constrained politically by their mythologies, presents a paradox worth further exploration.

Mythologies and Change: Israeli and Palestinian Experience Compared

Both Palestinians and Israelis are prisoners of history and memory.[47] They have too much shared history and too little geography for the situation to be otherwise. Collective memories among Israelis have an ongoing effect on their search for security and for regional acceptance as a distinctive national presence. In the Palestinian case, collective memories and mythologies have continued to shape a weary progress toward statehood.

As discussed earlier, the Zionist enterprise was adept at extrapolating from a number of historical and quasi-historical images a series of ideas

and ideals and legends that it orchestrated to match a carefully constructed retrospective narrative suited to its nation-building objectives. That process generally continued to apply in the period following statehood, especially among external audiences. For Diaspora Jewry and Israel's other supporters in Western countries, the embryonic Jewish state represented an atonement for indifference to the Nazi death camps. While always subjected to critical analysis from within its ranks, Zionism served to unite Diaspora Jewry. And the Diaspora overwhelmingly identified with Israel as the symbol of the Jewish will to survive, even after the Holocaust.[48]

The general character and direction of Israeli society remained largely intact despite the challenges to popular history that came about in the last two decades of the twentieth century. For most Israelis, the moral dimension of the state-building narrative was more durable than some of its critics, especially among the Palestinians, might have wished. The established Israeli narrative of successful struggle through strength and self-reliance continued unabated. Its conservatism was reinforced by the unremitting public hostility toward Israel of Arab media and political circles, especially below the leadership level.

Evidence of uncertainty was also highly visible, however, as Israel approached its fiftieth anniversary. An unprecedented degree of critical self-examination in Israeli circles was reflected, for example, in fundamental debate about the means and ends and goals of the Zionist project. As mentioned earlier, there was an upsurge in revisionist historical analysis and the demystification of Israeli history in the popular media.[49] Zionist imagery, contrasting between tough, resourceful Israelis who made their own history, and the imagery of passive Diaspora Jews who went to their slaughter in the Holocaust, mutated into a more realistic and humane approach to suffering that saw the Holocaust as a dominant myth in cementing national identity. Divisions appeared to sharpen between the religious and secular segments of Israeli society.[50]

The Palestinian issue also appeared for the first time to be having an important impact on the Israeli collective psyche. The taboos associated with mutual recognition between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples were gradually breaking down, after a lengthy period of mutual denial, assisted by the abatement of perceptions of an existential threat to Israel from that quarter.[51]

The extent and depth of these changes should not be overstated. Nur Masalha outlines in some detail the breadth and durability of support within Israel for the view that territory beyond its pre-1967 borders should remain under its control. Far from being restricted to extremist zealots, he shows that the arguments favoring this approach were evident in the heyday of Labour Zionism from 1967 to 1977, have been an ongoing feature of Zionist Revisionism from Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky to Benjamin Netanyahu, and have continued to be heard among Jewish religious fundamentalists and

secular ultranationalist parties and movements on the far Right of Israeli politics. Both Jewish and Christian fundamentalists alike—who saw territorial issues as merely the superficial aspects of a metaphysical struggle for the completion of Israel's inheritance of the whole Promised Land and the return of the Messiah to rule over the united people of Israel—maintained an irreducible attachment to the Land of Israel in its entirety. For them the notion of Jews relinquishing land was abhorrent.[52]

However, for most Israelis both from the Left and from the Right, a settlement with the Arab world through the Madrid process launched after the Gulf War in 1991, and with the Palestinians through the Oslo process, came to be seen, for a time, as the most rational approach in terms of Israeli national interests. The establishment of peace and diplomatic relations with Jordan in 1994, for example, passed with barely a complaint from the Israeli Right. Those ties strengthened under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government despite the Revisionist Zionist view that both banks of the Jordan River were supposed to be Israel's. And for much of the 1990s, although some prominent Israelis continued to insist that the Palestinians could never be mollified and that compromise settlement with them was impossible, there was strong empirical evidence of popular support from all sides of Israeli politics for peace to be reached, at least in principle, on the basis of a two-state solution.

The point of the discussion presented here is that there is evidence to support the view that the deliberate, conscious construction and reconstruction of mythologies may be feasible under real-life circumstances, but it will depend to a very large extent on the wider political circumstances and experience of the society within which those mythologies are maintained. Zionist and Israeli experience, in particular, suggests that over time, leaderships seeking to mold political outcomes may succeed in refurbishing historical narratives and building new political mythologies. But the capacity of both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to introduce changes to mythologies, should they choose to do so, has been shaped mainly by evolving political circumstances.

For many Israelis during the 1990s there was confidence and optimism that security could be enhanced and made more sustainable through the modification, to a significant degree, of long-standing convictions. There was also a degree of soul-searching, especially among the Israeli Left, associated with the experience of the Lebanon war, the intifada, and the search for a negotiated solution to the conflict with the Palestinians, which opened the way to fresh perspectives.

The misgivings and opposition engendered from the religious nationalist Right and its secular supporters, including the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, underlined the resistance of that part of Israeli society to perceived dangers to the Jewish character of Israel. They were

determined to prevent the undermining of what Ze'ev Sternhell refers to as its tribal values.[53] And yet, in spite of those concerns, a paradigm shift became firmly established among most secular Israelis in support of sharing the Promised Land.

For the majority of Israelis by the mid-1990s, there was a record of success in shaping the political environment, especially in the international context. Israel also enjoyed a situation of military superiority that, when taken together with its political and diplomatic record, provided a basis for a more self-confident society. Israelis grew gradually more receptive to the West and its values, rather than providing ongoing, uncritical support to Zionism as an enterprise for the rescue of the Jews and for their mass transfer to Israel. With such levels of national self-confidence to sustain political leadership, it is not surprising that a settlement with the Palestinians through the launch of the Oslo process came to be seen as the most rational approach in terms of Israeli national interests. That shift continued, at least until the violence of the last few months of 2000 left many Israelis fearing, in the words of Yossi Klein Halevi, that there was neither a biblical past to return to nor perhaps a peaceful future to anticipate.[54]

For the Palestinians, very different circumstances have applied during the 1990s. The Palestinian experience described later in this book will suggest that refugee mythologies constrained political options by providing a ready-made basis for conservatism and efforts to defend the political status quo against externally inspired alternatives. It will be seen later that Arafat showed similar pragmatism in using the connection between political mythology, imagery, and political calculation in the management of the political fallout from the 1997 financial crisis in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Far from being malleable, essentially rationalizing mechanisms amenable to creative development, refugee mythologies were a factor in the 1990s to which, in further contrast to the Zionist experience, the Palestinian political leadership felt it was obliged to respond. It chose to respond, moreover, in the case of UNRWA, not by challenging or altering that mythology but rather by channeling the mobilizing force of Palestinian mythologies into areas that posed the least political risk for the Palestinian Authority.

Although certain social, political, and experiential factors constrained the rate of change in Palestinian refugee mythologies, there was no obvious reason to argue that the nature of Palestinian mythologies necessarily rendered them less capable of being reconstructed than those of Israelis. The resistance to change arose, rather, from deep-seated social factors, including notions of identity, dignity, and feelings of historical grievance that provided the core perceptual framework through which daily experience was viewed.

For the Palestinian leadership there was no record of comprehensive success in meeting popular aspirations at the governmental or popular levels

during the 1990s. Moreover, as will be discussed later, the discipline imposed by the emerging state apparatus under Arafat was perceived to be oriented toward maintaining the stability of leadership-level dealings with Israel, and toward the preservation of the privileges arising for a select few from that relationship. For the vast majority of Palestinians, the Oslo framework came to be seen not in terms of the promises and assumptions of its architects but rather as a process of political disillusionment involving movement restrictions, collective punishments, and the deliberate creation of an overprivileged leadership out of touch with its own people.[55]

A more determined effort on Israel's part to support the principles underlying the Oslo process, and a more credible Palestinian political leadership that eschewed corruption and that built respect for its observance of democratic processes, even while maintaining a rigorous approach to upholding its security responsibilities toward Israel, might have provided Arafat with the capacity to reshape popular expectations through placing the limits to the politically possible on view. But that was not the direction taken under Arafat. The indignities and stress suffered by ordinary Palestinians throughout the Oslo period weighed heavily against the likelihood that the process could be brought to a successful conclusion.

As will be discussed in more detail later, the Palestinian leadership, for its part, also faced a difficult challenge after 1993 in identifying historical metaphors and images that could be applied to nation-building ends within the framework of the Oslo process. In terms of concrete achievements, the outcomes brought about through negotiations within the Oslo framework from 1993 to 1995, and especially in the period from 1996 onward, had fallen well short of Palestinian aspirations. The same was true, of course, of Israeli perceptions of the process.[56]

Despite the Oslo process, the central experiences in the Palestinian historical narrative were dispossession and, in the case of refugees and nonrefugees alike in the West Bank and Gaza, the struggle against Israeli occupation. In the collective memory there was an ongoing sense of betrayal by both the West and fellow Arabs. At the individual level, a range of humiliating personal and familial experiences provided ongoing reminders of the consequences of being unable to exercise fully the right to self-determination. It was those factors, rather than sophisticated analyses and arcane debates among political elites over the formal acceptance of UN Security Council Resolution 242 and the obligations later embraced by the PLO leadership, that drove the popular political agenda.

Most important of all, the traumas recounted in the Palestinian political mythology—all too often reinforced by direct personal experience—ultimately provided a potent source of shared beliefs and values that strengthened and sustained the Palestinian sense of identity. Collective memory of historical injustice and suffering blended with the fixative of political

mythology to bolster the rejection of the unpalatable. Resistance to making formal and acknowledged compromises or concessions to Israel on matters of principle reflected a reluctance on the part of ordinary Palestinians to accept, viscerally or openly, that the logic of power, politics, economics, and international realities had prevailed over the just settlement of their cause.

There was understandable outrage at having had the historical misfortune to be on the weaker side, to have been all too often poorly led and counseled, and to have been gradually displaced from among the prime concerns of the Arab world and the international community. That sense of injustice needed to be buffered. Mythological devices—ranging from conspiracy theories (discussed in more detail in Chapter 2) to millenarian notions and even references to the Crusades—helped to meet that need.

Mythologies and Power: Scholarly and Folk Mythologies

The communication and interpretation of mythologies is closely linked to perceptions of status and political power. And because mythologies are so intimately linked to relationships defined by and often expressed in terms of political power, it seems reasonable to assume that they are unlikely to alter unless relations change in terms of power. The preceding discussion of the limits to political manipulation of mythology in the Palestinian case also suggests that even with changes in power relationships, certain mythologies may prove remarkably durable, for reasons that may have more to do with the search for identity and authenticity and the protection of material interests than with the relativities of power.

Mythologies have starting points, as Lawson mentions, in real or imagined events. They are also a means, as noted above, by which contemporary realities are understood and explained. But as discussed below, the interaction between, on the one hand, mythology as an intellectual framework and, on the other hand, mythology as a device for political mobilization and of political convenience, is complex.

The limited integration of Palestinian society and the weakness of communication within it affects the degree of penetration of mythologies among different social levels or groups. The impact of mythologies as an interpretive framework will also have close connections to wider contexts, including the personal beliefs and experiences of individuals, in which those mythologies are presented.

If Michel Foucault is correct in his assertion that power produces knowledge, imbalances within societies in terms of political power are likely to have consequences for the sharing and, in particular, for the interpretation of such knowledge.[57] This in turn may lead to differences, if not

in substance of collective memories and mythologies, then at least in the importance and possibly also in the continuity attached to them by individuals and groups. Although the differences between them are likely to be largely one of degree, a distinction may therefore be drawn between what might be described as scholarly mythologies, on the one hand, and popular or folk mythologies, on the other.

In the Palestinian context, at least, scholarly mythologies may be defined as mythologies held among those who are self-consciously part of a wider picture that involves an appreciation of the complexity of interaction with Israel, with other external parties, and with a changing global environment. The mythology and the person who assimilates it through the lens of his or her own experience are, in this context, inseparable in practice from one another. They are, to use Jeffrey Checkel's phrase, mutually constituted.[58]

For the holders of scholarly mythologies, the practical challenges of securing particular rights enshrined in those mythologies, at least in meaningful or predictable time frames, have to be weighed against a wider range of possibilities and priorities. The perceived rights arising from such scholarly mythologies are in no sense diminished by awareness of the wider factors shaping the Palestinian future. However, there is also in most cases a recognition that the pathways to fulfillment of those rights inevitably will require establishing a secure future for Palestinians and Israelis alike. To a significant extent, achieving that outcome will depend upon reaching not only a territorial accommodation between the two national forces, but also agreed historical narratives that can be conveyed to future generations as part of a process of mutual accommodation, if not reconciliation.

Such considerations do not apply at the folk level of collectively held mythologies, where scholarly and politically practical proclivities toward mutual understanding and recognition of the predicaments of the other are all but nonexistent. Indeed, as discussed earlier, those who are seen as promoting scholarly mythologies—whether they be Palestinians or Israelis—are all too often at risk of professional victimization or worse. That is the case especially if—as with the Israeli new historians—their approach involves reinterpreting or reimagining their national past or suggesting that a different national trajectory should be considered. Scholarly mythologies also are vulnerable when the assumptions and beliefs underlying their reasoning are confronted by evidence or actions that call assumptions of good faith and rational political calculation alike into grave doubt.

This suggested distinction between scholarly and folk mythologies may be helpful to understanding the disjunction of Palestinian views of the peace process during the 1990s. But it also raises important questions about the capacity of leaders to bring about changes in folk mythologies. Robert Helmreich, taking an empirical approach without reference to Middle East issues, has drawn attention to the linkages between stress and the lowering

of self-esteem, on the one hand, and the influence, respectively, of peer groups and leaders, on the other. Helmreich argues that the evaluations individuals make of their personal worth can be lowered by stresses that reduce feelings of competence in dealing with physical and social environments. Such reactions may be associated with greater dependency on both peers and leaders, heightened "persuadability," and impaired performance including cheating and other behavior consistent with low self-evaluation.[59]

In low-stress situations, according to studies cited by Helmreich, communication produces more attitude change when attributed to a highly credible, authoritative source than when it is alleged to come from a less knowledgeable and trustworthy communicator. Under conditions of high stress, however, the peer group tends to elicit more change than the expert. In other words, attitudes of people with low self-esteem, under stress, are more influenced by low-status communicators than by high-status communicators. The individual needs to minimize his or her perceived deviation from the "normative" response of peers or other low-status individuals, and to augment feelings of being part of a "normal" group.

According to Helmreich's hypothesis, agreeing with an authoritative figure, under stressful conditions, may indeed increase feelings of deviance among individuals if the authority is seen as holding views that differ from those of the peer reference group. Even an authority toward whom a person of low self-esteem displays great dependency (the relationship between UNRWA and refugees comes to mind) may be a less potent referent for determination of attitudes than a peer or status equal who can define a "normative" response.[60] Thus, in situations of stress, "the perceptions of a reference group reaction may be a strong enough influence to outweigh all other considerations in determining the effectiveness of attempts at persuasion. In a conflict between loyalty to the group and loyalty to the leader . . . it is probable that group loyalty will dominate."[61] Helmreich's analytical approach will be drawn upon later in this study when seeking to assess the impact of collective memories and mythologies on conflict resolution in the Palestinian refugee context.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has ranged widely over concepts and issues that will now be addressed in greater detail in some areas. The core elements that need to be addressed in the study of refugee mythologies and the search for peace, however, are suggested by the foregoing discussion.

First, the political impact of refugee mythologies needs to be understood within the wider context of Palestinian political culture and the particular historical, political, social, and economic circumstances of Palestinian refugees.

Refugee memories and mythologies, including the place occupied by UNRWA in those mythologies, are not simply ideas existing in a historical or political vacuum. Instead, following Durkheim's approach, it is argued here that they are ultimately an extension of collective experience, real or imagined, conscious and unconscious. They are structural issues. They are a fundamental part of refugee identity, individually and collectively, and they do not appear susceptible to externally imposed change. They have to be understood as Palestinian refugees see them and not as others might like them to be considered, including within broader frameworks of ends and means associated with the search for peace.

Second, the possibilities that there are connections between power, stress, and receptivity to change, and that a distinction can be drawn between scholarly and folk mythologies, provide reasonable conceptual starting points for analysis of Palestinian refugee political behavior. However, the impact of mythologies and memories is easier to observe and understand in practice than to discuss in the abstract, because a wide range of variables are in play in the constantly changing arena of Palestinian politics. The latter half of this book will therefore focus mostly on the interplay between political developments and mythologies during the 1990s and during the events of 1997 surrounding UNRWA. That will lead to a discussion of the importance of mythologies so far as the search for peace is concerned, including the issues of when, how, and why change may occur, and an analysis of options that might be considered in the meantime.

Notes

Chapter-opening epigraph is from Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 134.

1. Judith Kipper and Harold Saunders, eds. *The Middle East in Global Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), p. 13. See also the interview with Dennis Ross in the *Jerusalem Post,* 19 January 2001.

2. Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post–Cold War Era* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991), pp. 60–61; Robert Bowker, *Beyond Peace: The Search for Security in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996), p. 5.

3. Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* p. 134.

4. David Shipler, *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), p. 16.

5. Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed Books, 1994), p. 9, citing T. Asad, "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Anthropology," in J. Clifford and G. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

6. Rami Khouri, foreword to Donna Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens: Palestinians and the End of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1996), p. xi.

7. Peter Black and Kevin Avruch, "Culture, Power, and International Negotiations: Understanding Palau-U.S. Status Negotiations," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 22, no. 3 (1993), p. 382.

8. Robert Wistrich and David Ohana, eds., *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory, and Trauma* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. ix.

9. Steven Seidman, "Modernity and the Problem of Meaning: The Durkheimian Tradition," in Peter Hamilton, ed., *Emile Durkheim: Critical Assessments,* vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 286. See also Harry Alpert, *Emile Durkheim and His Sociology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), pp. 199–203.

10. Seidman, "Modernity and the Problem of Meaning," p. 280.

11. Carl Becker, "What Are Historical Facts?" in P. L. Snyder, ed., *Detachment and the Writing of History: Essays and Letters of Carl L. Becker* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 61, cited in Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 3.

12. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 2.

13. Randa Farah, "Crossing Boundaries: Reconstruction of Palestinian Identities in Al-Baq'a Refugee Camp, Jordan," in Riccardo Bocco, Blandine Destremau, and Jean Hannoyer, eds., *Palestine, Palestiniens: Territoire national, espaces communautaires* (Amman: Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain [CERMOC], 1997), pp. 280–282.

14. Ibid., p. 280.

15. On the Kurds, see, for example, Jonathan C. Randal, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness? My Encounters with Kurdistan* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999). For an insightful and entertaining overview of the challenges facing contemporary Christian minorities in the region, see William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium* (London: Flamingo/HarperCollins, 1998).

16. Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots,* pp. 3–8. See also Wistrich and Ohana, *The Shaping of Israeli Identity.*

17. Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism,* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 23 (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), cited in Milton Viorst, *Sandcastles: The Arabs in Search of the Modern World* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994), p. 58.

18. Jean C. Cooper, ed., *Brewer's Book of Myth and Legend* (Oxford: Helicon, 1995), p. v (emphasis added).

19. Stephanie Lawson, *The Politics of Authenticity: Ethnonationalist Conflict and the State,* Working Paper no. 125 (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1992), pp. 23–24. Lawson cites the example of the Trobriand Islanders as a group who have invested their culture within and against the context of colonialism and the state of Papua New Guinea. Lawson refers to James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 276.

20. According to Sorel, whether the content of the myth materializes is as irrelevant as the issue among messianic Christian movements about whether the second coming of Christ will actually occur. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1925), quoted in John L. Stanley, ed., *From George Sorel: Essays in Socialism and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 42 (italic emphasis is in the original, which appears in Sorel, *Reflections on Violence,* p. 180).

21. Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots,* p. 215.

22. Chaim Weizmann, cited in Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (London: John Murray, 2002), p. 423.

23. Meron Benvenisti, cited in Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain,* p. 334.

To keep Benvenisti's assertion in perspective, it should also be pointed out that Palestinian school textbooks refer to the national, political, cultural, economic, religious, and historical importance of Jerusalem and its Arab and Islamic characteristics without mentioning its religious and historical significance to Judaism and to the Jews, or to Israel.

24. Bowker, *Beyond Peace,* p. 67.

25. See, for example, the erudite but politically irrelevant dissection of the Palestinian claim to Jerusalem as the capital of a state in Daniel Pipes, "The Muslim Claim to Jerusalem," *Middle East Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (Fall 2001).

26. See, for example, Danny Rubinstein, "'Jerusalem Is Part of the Homeland, the Refugees Are the Homeland Itself,'" *Ha'aretz,* 30 January 2001; and Danny Rubinstein, "The PLO Is Rising—and the PA Is Sinking," *Ha'aretz,* 20 February 2001. For a comprehensive review of the outcomes and the politics of the negotiations at Camp David in July 2000 and at Taba, Egypt, in January 2001, including the progress achieved on the refugee issue, see Deborah Sontag, "Quest for Mideast Peace: How and Why It Failed," *New York Times,* 26 July 2001; and Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors," *New York Review of Books,* 9 August 2001.

27. At the same time, it is important to remember that those who study the mythologies of others do so inevitably with their own biases, including in regard to the assembling and weighting of factual information. Edward Carr has observed, on that score, that the individual apart from society would be "both speechless and mindless." Edward Carr, *What Is History?* (London: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 31, 70.

28. For an excellent analysis of the events and mythologies surrounding the battle of Karameh, see W. Andrew Terrill, "The Political Mythology of the Battle of Karameh," *Middle East Journal* 55, no. 1 (Winter 2001). On Arafat's alleged whereabouts, according to senior Jordanian officials Zeid al-Rifai and Adnan Abu Odeh, and the Jordanian role at the battle, see John Wallach and Janet Wallach, *Arafat: In the Eyes of the Beholder* (London: Heinemann, 1991, p. 310). Irrespective of the facts of the matter, Palestinians have very good reasons to claim Arafat was there, and Jordanians, especially in view of the conflict that ensued afterward with the Palestinians over their behavior in Jordan, have equally good reasons to claim he was not.

29. On Trumpeldor, see Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots,* pp. 159–160.

30. Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 197.

31. Ibid., pp. 199–200.

32. Avi Shlaim, "Israel and the Arab Coalition in 1948," in Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 79–80.

33. Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots,* pp. xviii, 3–6, 232–235.

34. Shlaim, "Israel and the Arab Coalition."

35. Important works by "revisionist" or "new" historians, many of which are referred to elsewhere in this study, include Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem;* Boaz Evron, *Jewish State or Israeli Nation?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Simha Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians, 1917–1947*

(London: Croon Helm, 1979); Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Ilan Pappe, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947–1951* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1992); and Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots.* See also Benny Morris, "Refabricating 1948" (a review of E. Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli History: The "New Historians"* [London: Frank Cass, 1997]), *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1998).

36. For reporting on the outcry in Israel over the *Tekumma* series in exposing Israelis to more critical analysis of their history by Morris, Ilan Pappe, and others, including from the perspective of Palestinians, see Marjorie Miller, "For Some Israelis a TV History of the Nation Airs Wrong Voices," *International Herald Tribune,* 1 April 1997.

37. Ethan Bronner, "In Israel, New Grade School Texts for History Replace Myths with Facts," *New York Times,* 14 August 1999.

38. *International Herald Tribune,* 1 April 1997.

39. Benny Morris, *1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 16. The controversy surrounding the question of responsibility, and Morris's work on that issue, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

40. Noted archaeologist Jerome Murphy-O'Connor has commented that the account of Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, alleging that mass suicide took place at Masada in A.D. 73, is "utterly incredible from the moment the Romans [allegedly] retire once they have breached the wall. . . . Josephus the Jewish apologist invented the speech of [rebel leader Eleazar ben Jair] to lay the blame for the war, not on the Jewish people as such, but on a minority of violent revolutionaries, the Sicarii. Josephus the rhetorical historian elaborated the suicide of some into the dramatic mass suicide of all, using motifs from the Graeco-Roman historiographical tradition. Josephus himself would have failed to recognise the radically distorted version of his story which became an important foundation myth of Israeli Zionists." Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 335–337.

41. Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots,* pp. 232–235.

42. Bowker, *Beyond Peace,* p. 65. Bourguiba also advocated (in 1965 and 1973) acceptance by the PLO of the UN's 1947 partition plan for Palestine. He also caused relations with Jordan to rupture in 1973 by asserting that the Emirate of Jordan was a British creation to satisfy Emir Abdullah and that "Jordan is only the name of a river, whereas Palestine is a reality with a history going back to the Pharaohs." Alain Gresh, *The PLO: The Struggle Within,* rev. ed. (London: Zed Books, 1988), pp. 120–121.

43. The theatrical quality of Arafat's leadership style is well described in Andrew Gowers and Tony Walker, *Behind the Myth: Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Revolution* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1991).

44. Ibid., p. 354.

45. Yossi Klein Halevi, "Dreamless Present," *Washington Post,* 26 November 2000.

46. Wistrich and Ohana, *The Shaping of Israeli Identity,* p. x.; Ze'ev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State,* translated by David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 338.

47. Peter Rodgers captures the sense of this in his excellent novel *The Prison of Memory* (London: Minerva Press, 1999).

48. David J. Goldberg, *To the Promised Land: A History of Zionist Thought from Its Origins to the Modern State of Israel* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 250–251.

49. For a critical appraisal of post-Zionism, as well as an appraisal of leftist critics of Zionism dating back to the binationalist movement of pre-Israel Palestine, see Yoram Hazony, *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul* (New York: Basic/New Republic Books, 2000).

50. Wistrich and Ohana, *The Shaping of Israeli Identity,* p. xi.

51. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity,* pp. 203–205.

52. Nur Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), pp. 28–41.

53. Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel,* pp. 338–343.

54. Halevi, "Dreamless Present."

55. Amira Hass, "The Revolt of the Guinea-Pigs," *Ha'aretz,* 21 February 2001.

56. Thomas Friedman has observed that the longer the Oslo process went on, "the less people felt that Arafat and the Arabs were really ready to accept Israelis as a people who had come home." Thomas Friedman, "For Israel, a Fiftieth Birthday Year of Worry and Division," *International Herald Tribune,* 16 February 1998, p. 8.

57. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Press, 1977), p. 27.

58. Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics* 50 (January 1998), p. 328.

59. Robert Helmreich, "Stress, Self-Esteem, and Attitudes," in Bert T. King and Elliot McGinnies, eds., *Attitudes, Conflict, and Social Change* (New York: Academic Press, 1972), p. 36.

60. Ibid., p. 40.

61. Ibid., p. 41.

2

Political Culture

To write of Palestine is to write of exile.
—Edward Said

Political culture—the beliefs, attitudes, practices, and values that play a part in the shaping of societies, and of which mythologies and collective memories are an important part—provides a framework for understanding the relationship between individual Palestinians and their environment.[1] Like political culture in general, Palestinian political culture is a historical creation that is subject to constant elaboration and development through the activities of individuals and groups. The ongoing conflict between Palestinian and Israeli political aspirations and security needs has created, on the Palestinian side at least, much of the distinctive identity and political culture to which Palestinians in general subscribe.

A more detailed examination of historical issues appears in the following chapter. At this point, however, because of their centrality to the shaping of Palestinian identity, memories, and mythologies, it is appropriate to review how mutual perceptions of Palestinians and Israelis have developed. This will be followed by an analysis of some of the other factors that shaped Palestinian political mythologies during the 1990s.

Palestinian Perspectives of Zionism Before and After 1948

In developing their respective political cultures, Israelis and Palestinians have drawn upon various historical, collective, and personal experiences and images to create mythologies about themselves, and about each other, that affect fundamentally their social and political interaction. If the Arab population of Palestine had not been completely sure of its identity within the Arab world before 1948—and a sense of Palestinian identity was increasingly

evident from the first decade of the twentieth century—the experience of defeat, dispossession, and exile in 1948 guaranteed their identity as Palestinians.[2] The initial Israeli-Palestinian conflict represented a defining experience that became, over time, the dominant element in the consciousness of both communities.

The diversity and complexity of the early Zionist movement make generalization about its initial approach to dealings with the Palestinians difficult.[3] For most of the time before the existential struggle of 1948, the issue of Palestinian nationalism was merely an element in the peripheral vision of many within the Jewish community in Mandate Palestine and beyond, loosely connected to their problem of establishing and sustaining a Jewish state in a majority Arab population.

Dealings between the two sides were also affected significantly by the political impact of Palestinian rioting against the Jewish presence in 1920 and 1921, and the more widespread and serious violence of 1929. The latter events saw the effective collapse of Jewish support for arguments, advanced by supporters of Brit Shalom, a cosmopolitan group of Jewish intellectuals, socialists, and visionary humanists, favoring the creation of a binational state in which Jews and Arabs would enjoy equal rights.[4]

More significant, however, than the political failure of the binational approaches was the ongoing political contest between, on the one hand, the mainstream Zionist leadership under Chaim Weizmann and later David Ben Gurion, and on the other hand, the Revisionist Zionist movement founded and led by Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky. According to Simha Flapan, most of the key decisions taken by the early Zionist leadership were either shaped by heated debate with, or sought to counteract the policies and influence of, the Revisionist Zionist movement.[5]

Jabotinsky left, through the Revisionist movement, an indelible mark on the Zionist attitude toward the Arab question, arguing that accommodation with Arab nationalism was neither desirable nor necessary.[6] The early Zionist leadership mainstream, represented by figures such as Weizmann, had largely sought to ignore the Palestinians but comprehended the potential importance of the Arab world to the realization of their goals. Jabotinsky, however, argued that Arab acceptance of the Zionist presence in Palestine would not come until they had given up all hope of removing what he acknowledged to be an alien presence.

Morally, Jabotinsky argued, Zionism was a positive force, and the building of an "iron wall" of Jewish military force was therefore morally justified. Through the British presence, Jabotinsky hoped to face the Arabs with a situation of overwhelming Jewish power in control of the country.[7] It was, he insisted, the only means to bring the Arabs to a willingness to compromise and to bargain "on practical matters, such as guarantees against pushing them out, and equality of civil and national rights." Jabotinsky had no

qualms about the use of force to secure those aims: "A sacred truth, whose realization requires the use of force, does not cease thereby to be a sacred truth. This is the basis of our stand toward Arab resistance; and we shall talk of a settlement only when they are ready to discuss it."[8] Flapan observes that Jabotinsky

> implanted in Jewish psychology the image of the Arab as the mortal enemy, the idea of the inevitability of the conflict and of the impossibility of the solution except by sheer force. He propagated the "either-or" notion by which all and every means was justified including terror and ruthless retaliation in the struggle for survival. Attitudes of this kind could not be maintained without an appeal to the most primitive instincts of fear and self-defence, without unleashing emotions of hate and vengeance, without painting the Arab as a primitive, evil and cruel creature scheming diabolical plans, and without inflating feelings of self-righteousness to the point where the whole, absolute truth and justice were on one side only.[9]

The degree of divergence between the overall aims (as distinct from the tactics) of socialist Zionists and their Revisionist critics is debatable. David Ben Gurion, for example, did not use the terminology of the iron wall, but he shared Jabotinsky's analysis and conclusions.[10] Nevertheless the militaristic overtones of Jabotinsky's polemics, his provocative behavior, including at the outset of the 1929 riots, and the aspirations he expressed for Jewish statehood in the whole of Palestine including Transjordan put him at bitter odds with the leadership of the Zionist organization. There was resentment of the military spirit that Jabotinsky sought to introduce, and of his strong opposition to class struggle and socialist concepts that were widely supported in the Zionist mainstream.

The Revisionists brought the Jewish community in Palestine (the Yishuv) close to civil war, earning a reputation as fascists for their vicious antisocialist propaganda and hatred of *kibbutzim,* their strike-breaking activity, propaganda, and physical violence directed against the Histradut labor union, and their emphasis on military education and preparedness among the Revisionist youth movement Betar. The assassinations of Lord Moyne in November 1944 and Count Bernadotte in September 1948 by members of terrorist groups originating within the Revisionist movement were seen by the Zionist leadership as dangerous and misconceived ventures.

For their part, however, the Palestinian Arabs did not see—and perhaps had no reason to see—genuinely contradictory trends in Zionism during the Mandate period. Nor were they impressed by the existence of other significant figures in the Zionist movement such as Nahum Goldmann, Arthur Ruppin, and Judah Magnes, who rejected the militarism and chauvinism of Jabotinsky as immoral and politically disastrous both in terms of its effects on Arab opinion and for the character of Zionism as a progressive movement.[11]

In the absence of changes in the situation on the ground that ameliorated key Arab concerns—most notably measures to address landlessness, the lack of employment opportunities for Palestinian workers, and the ongoing and increasing inflow of Jewish immigrants—the Palestinians believed that Weizmann's and his colleagues' condemnations of Revisionist outrages were no more than a hypocritical cover-up.[12] There was little reason for the Arab population to disagree with the characterization of "socialist" Zionism by Bern Katznelson as an enterprise of conquest.[13] From a Palestinian perspective, Zionism never had any other objective.

The establishment of Israel and the failure to prevent or terminate that fact, with consequent suffering for the Palestinians and humiliation for other Arabs, represented a determining moment in modern Arab history. Arab public opinion, unprepared for military defeat, let alone defeat on such a comprehensive scale, lost faith in its political leaders. Those leaders had failed to live up to their rhetoric and save the Palestinians from the Zionist threat.[14]

At a regional level, the 1947–1949 conflict was the starting point for a series of social, cultural, and political changes that, within three years from the final armistice agreements signed in July 1949, saw the prime ministers of Egypt and Lebanon and the king of Jordan assassinated, and the president of Syria and the king of Egypt overthrown by military coups. The Arab-Israeli wars that followed, the Cold War in the Middle East, the rise of the Palestinian armed struggle, and the politics of peacemaking in the 1990s were all direct consequences of the 1948 conflict.[15] The conflict between the competing national aspirations created the perception of a world that had split into two—us and them—which, as Meron Benvenisti has suggested, became "a way of life, an endemic and organic condition" between the two national communities.[16]

Palestinian-Israeli Contacts During the 1990s

Prior to the second major outbreak of violence between the two sides, which began at the end of September 2000, Palestinian encounters with Israelis ranged from the relatively benign—including casual employment and observation of Israeli political behavior—to detention in Israeli prisons of large numbers of Palestinians and abuses of human rights and dignity. A senior Israeli official, Yuri Savir, acknowledged in 1998 that during the twenty-eight years of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, about one-third of the Palestinian population had, at one time or another, been detained or imprisoned by Israel, and "the whole of the population had, at some time, been grossly humiliated."[17] The traumatic impact of large-scale detentions on Palestinian society, economic institutions, civil society, and

education, and the role these factors have played in shaping political attitudes a decade later, are now more clearly visible.[18]

Throughout the 1990s there were also, of course, groups on both sides seeking to engender a sense of mutuality between Israelis and Palestinians. Examples included organizations such as Peace Now; feminist groups such as Women in Black, the Jerusalem Link, and the Haifa Women's Centre; and the Israel-Palestine Centre for Research and Information (IPCRI), Neve Shalom, Seeds of Peace, and the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. Bar Ilan University, a Right-wing institution in Israeli political terms, established a program in conflict resolution studies in 1997 that focused on both intra-Jewish and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. All of the above actively promoted constructive approaches to peacebuilding and the lowering of social and psychological barriers to contact and dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. Their programs, however, were little known among the Palestinian and Israeli community in general, and reached relatively small numbers of individuals.

There was also widespread reluctance among Palestinians to regard confidence-building gestures as a means of progressing their political goals. The psychological gap was too vast, and the political consequences of such activity were too uncertain to make engagement in peacebuilding programs with Israelis a serious option for many Palestinians. In most areas of Palestinian society there were significant risks of personal and professional ostracism for participating in or supporting activities aimed at developing normal relations with Israelis. Opposition to such activities was particularly strong and well organized among associations of lawyers, engineers, teachers, and other professionals in which politically motivated groups competed for elected positions.[19] Without a strong foundation of mutual interest between individuals, such as shared employment, it was also difficult to sustain personal contacts that might, in time, have lead to modification of mutual suspicions and stereotyping across the physical obstacles of separation and the cultural differences that separated the two societies.[20]

Anecdotal evidence indicated, moreover, that even among those who dealt fairly routinely with Israeli counterparts, not all Palestinians felt positive about their experiences. Perceived Israeli attitudes in general toward the Palestinians were a fundamental problem. As Ahmad Khalidi put it, "Beyond the material elements of power that have helped to determine [Israeli attitudes] there appears to lie a somewhat diffuse and unique combination of fear, guilt, condescension and—for want of a better word—contempt."[21]

Beyond those Palestinians who had the opportunity to encounter Israelis on equal social or professional terms, there was a gulf that no amount of dialogue could bridge. As Rashid Khalidi, Ehud Ya'ari, and others have observed, and as I and anyone else who has witnessed the passage of Palestinians through Israeli checkpoints in Gaza and the West Bank can attest, a

range of daily experiences of indignity reinforced and reminded many Palestinians of their historical background and the grievances that are part of their identity. The primary effect upon most ordinary Palestinians of routine interaction with Israelis—of indignities generating what Rashid Khalidi describes as an almost unique postmodern condition of shared anxiety at the frontier, the checkpoint, and the crossing point—was the reinforcement of resentment.[22] The interference of Israeli security forces with the routine of daily life was degrading.[23]

A Postcard from Jerusalem

I live halfway up a hill on a narrow track, paved to the width of one small car, with edges that deteriorate steadily with the wet weather. It is a track you would hardly notice as you drive past its opening on the "highway" from Jerusalem to Ramallah at the bottom of the hill, and that is odd, because it is the border between Jerusalem and the West Bank. My house is in the West Bank; the vacant lot opposite is in Jerusalem.

Every morning the narrow street is full of Palestinians as they pour down the hill to catch the "sheroots" (minibuses) which will take them to work. They come down my hill because they have left their "first" sheroots just short of the major Ramallah checkpoint which is 50 metres on the West Bank side of the highway, and then walked up the hill to avoid the checkpoint. None have the essential Jerusalem ID card, without which no-one legally can enter the city. They are "illegals."

Periodically in Jerusalem there are major roundups. Then the Israeli soldiers wait until people are pouring down my street, block off both ends and truck them away.

It is Ramadan, the holy month where Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. They flood into the Dome of the Rock, Islam's third most sacred site, to pray in the company of their friends. And on Fridays now hundreds of soldiers pour into the streets around my home in a determined and grim jawed effort to stop them from getting there.

The Palestinians are a mixture, the old and devout from the villages, the poor and uncertain, children proud beside their parents as they are brought to pray in the main mosque for the first time, the young and arrogant, dressed in their best and strutting for the white-veiled girls with their shy smiles, fluid bodies and secret eyes. Most come in buses and are turned away at the checkpoint, some rage, some argue, some quietly get back into buses. Many women sit in their embroidered dresses on the edges of the muddy gutters down the median strips and mop up tired tears with the edges of their white muslin holiday scarves. Many will try again next week in a small hope that maybe, maybe, they will be allowed to pray at Al-Aksa mosque during the fasting month.

(continues)

A Postcard from Jerusalem (cont.)

Some though, the bold or the brave or those who have tried and been turned away for two Fridays already, try to duck the system. They head for the hills, and the labyrinth of vacant blocks and dirt tracks and high concrete walls, and half-finished buildings that offer cover and hiding places. Many have not realised that the hiding places are already full of soldiers, who lounge in their bullet proof vests apparently relaxed and smoking on grungy walls and inside ground floor puddle-filled building sites without doors or windows, loosely swinging their guns. They are waiting for the hunt to start.

From the roof we can see a slow river of people pouring up the tracks into our side of the hill. There are more on the other side of the road. The soldiers are nudging each other, "wait a bit, let them get closer, close those gaps." Then suddenly there is tension, the air snaps tight as a rubber band and erupts into shouts. Panic stricken men are leaping and hurtling down the hills, backtracking, turning and skidding and trying to find gaps in the cordon. The soldiers hardly move—there is no hurry for them. The Arabs are trapped, they can't get out, let them run and get a bit tired.

Three young men have darted into our backyard. I can see them doubled over against the woodpile, under the naked and knotted vines which still hold the dried up raisins of last summer's fruit. One looks up and sees us on the roof. I can see a quick flicker of terror in the young man's eyes. His hand goes into his pocket—is he armed and should I be afraid? It comes out again—he is holding out a family photo, hardly visible from here but clearly a wife and children and his hand is entreating me. I have covered my eyes, I hope he will know that I didn't see him, don't want to have seen him.

I see in my mind a stretched out hand, rigid with entreaty, and a snapshot of a family a long way away from me with the sun on my back on a wide flat roof.

—Jennifer Bowker, *Postcards from Jerusalem*
(unpublished manuscript, 1998)

Palestinian Political Culture

Michel Foucault's insight concerning power and knowledge, and Robert Helmreich's observations in respect of stress and leadership, both of which were discussed in the preceding chapter, underline the importance of understanding the dynamics of Palestinian society in evaluating the impact of mythology upon Palestinian political behavior. Two key features of

Palestinian society and political dynamics stand out in that regard during the 1990s: elitism—family-based and authoritarian tradition in regard to social as well as political organization, and in patterns of Palestinian leadership at all levels—and neopatrimonialism.

Elitism

Socially and politically, Palestinian society—like most Arab societies—is highly stratified, patriarchal, and in Maya Rosenfeld's words "saliently familial."[24] Family and kinship ties are central to Palestinian society, finding expression in the dominant influence of family on the socialization and subsequent control over many aspects of the lives of individuals. Marianne Heiberg observes that in Palestinian society, education seems to have done little to erode ascribed status as the determinant of authority.[25] Family ties frequently provide the basis of affiliations. They are a core part of recruitment to organizations and nonfamilial institutions such as political factions and governmental bodies.[26] The familial pattern of social and political organization is closely associated with the notion of *asabiyya,* which Albert Hourani defines as "a corporate spirit oriented towards obtaining and keeping power."[27]

Differentials in access to wealth, literacy and higher education, and urban versus village society, and uneven access to political influence or power have been constant themes of Palestinian political culture at least since the Ottoman period.

Elia Zureik has argued that European and Zionist penetration of Palestine before 1948 created a form of dependency built on a dual society of Palestinian Arabs and Zionist colonists, with the Palestinians occupying a subordinate position in the power structure of the British Mandate period and displaying a deep rural-urban dichotomy and an inability to articulate a unifying Palestinian ideology.[28] A natural outcome of that situation was the continuation of wide disparities between the levels of political involvement of different parts of the society. Family members from low-income groups tended to be less politically active than those from high-income groups, and more inclined to migrate in pursuit of economic opportunity. They were also less likely to join parties espousing formal ideologies and social programs.[29] They tended to have higher expectations of their leaderships to produce outcomes than were probably warranted.[30]

In the West Bank prior to 1967, the Hashemite rulers of Jordan continued to co-opt and utilize the traditional elite as a means of enhancing their control. The Hashemites and their associates prevailed over the nationalist movements of the 1950s and 1960s, which brought historically less privileged groups to power or at least displaced traditional elites in most of the

remainder of the postcolonial Arab world. The Egyptian military administration of the Gaza Strip took a similar approach in using traditional elites as their instrument of control. Glenn Robinson has argued that there was little difference between Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Egyptian, and Israeli policies in the sense that each "ruler adopted and continued the policy of its predecessor. For each, the notables proved to be an indispensable asset, an intermediary without which states could not effectively rule. It was the collective genius of the notable class to be politically useful . . . and thereby to preserve their own privileged position."[31]The degree to which those with higher status and power in Palestinian society are responsive, if not ultimately responsible, to popular political opinion and demands is not easy to establish. On the other hand, neither in terms of its history nor in the contemporary context should it be thought that the Palestinian population at large is disposed to acquiesce readily to the wishes and manipulations of the political elite.[32]

The capacity of the Palestinian traditional, urban, educated elite to set the direction of political dialogue and struggle was not seriously challenged before the 1970s.[33] Substantial discrepancies in literacy, economic security, and understanding of the machinery of political power remained overwhelmingly to the elite's advantage. However, the relationship between the Palestinian elite and the wider Palestinian audience became more complex in the last three decades of the twentieth century, as traditional wielders of power and influence had to find a place alongside other holders of influence who emerged from nontraditional backgrounds.

Moreover, Arab society in general, including Palestinian society, was under intense pressure. Its future direction was uncertain.[34] Although the basic pattern of elitist and authoritarian approaches within political institutions and within family structures appeared in the 1980s to remain more or less intact, within some families there was pressure for more liberal approaches. This was balanced, perhaps more commonly among the Arabic-educated middle class, by movement toward greater conservatism on gender issues, especially among families under orthodox Islamic influence.[35]

Change affecting traditional patterns of authority at times was driving, and at other times was being driven by, changes in the political situation and objective factors on the ground. There were at least three key areas where certain unintended consequences of Israeli and Jordanian practices that developed after the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza from 1967 onward were to have major effects on the traditional pattern of Palestinian political authority.

First, the opening of Israel's labor market to Palestinians during the 1970s altered employment patterns and hastened the demise of the Palestinian agricultural sector. Wage-based, urbanized employment, while undermining the authority of the traditional Palestinian landholding class, had the effect, at least with respect to the agricultural sector, of "making peasants

into Palestinians."[36] Confiscations of land by the Israeli authorities undermined the social and political status of the notables still further.

Second, Israel sought to install nontraditional leaderships in the form of Village Leagues, believing that the traditional power brokers were antagonistic on nationalist grounds to their interests.[37] Because the individuals the Israelis sought to promote to such positions were almost universally regarded as criminals, collaborators, or worse, those efforts and the undermined authority of the traditional notables added impetus to the rise of a nontraditional secular Palestinian nationalist political elite.[38]

Jordanian efforts to retain a measure of control in the West Bank, against the growing tide of Palestinian nationalist sentiment favoring the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), also undermined the status of traditional notables. Public opinion in the West Bank had moved decisively against Jordan before the intifada, with a poll conducted by ABC News and *Newsday* published in September 1986 indicating that only 3 percent of the Palestinians who responded favored King Hussein as their leader.[39] Israeli assistance with the appointment of pro-Jordanian mayors such as Zafer al-Masri in Nablus in November 1985 rebounded when al-Masri was assassinated by the PFLP in March 1986. The Jordanian position in the West Bank was irreversibly degraded, in any event, by the effects of the uprising that began in December 1987.

Third, the graduation of rising numbers of Palestinians through Palestinian universities (Bir Zeit, Al-Najah, and Bethlehem), which did not exist in their present form before 1972, gave rise to a new generation of political activists from a different, lower social class than that of the traditional notables.[40] The activists were more likely to be from villages, small towns, and refugee camps than from the urban centers from which the notables, and those closest to Arafat, usually came.[41] The emergence of that generation reinforced the trend, evident under Mandate and Jordanian rule, toward the growth of an educated Palestinian workforce of civil servants, accountants, teachers, and administrators. That latter development was gradually changing the traditionally high proportion of the population who earned their livelihoods as peasants, artisans, and traders.[42]

Meanwhile, the elitist tradition in Palestinian society continued to find expression, in the political context, through a high level of separation between the setting of policy direction within the PLO, on the one hand, and the conduct of politics by the Palestinian leadership, on the other. In his highly critical appraisal of the role of Arab elites in contemporary Arab politics, Said Aburish claims that Arafat's greatest failing was "to try to manipulate the Palestinian establishment and conservative Arab governments and to take the rest of the Palestinians for granted."[43] There is some merit in that assessment.

During the 1980s the statist PLO leadership, while emphasizing the need for steadfastness in the popular struggle, nevertheless had limited aims

and objectives in terms of changing Palestinian society. According to Yezid Sayigh, in aiming to exercise political power in place of Israel, the PLO "viewed the population as a target audience to be co-opted through the provision of services and public goods. It strove neither for social mobilization, in the sense of assisting local communities or social groups to gain collective control over resources, nor for the transformation of social relations."[44]

After 1993, the membership of the Palestinian Authority and its instrumentalities did not reflect the broad scope of Palestinian society. Its composition included very few people from rural and refugee backgrounds. It had a disproportionate representation of middle-class professionals and traditional elites.[45] The mainstream PLO leadership shared little of the alleged concern among private voluntary bodies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to involve all sectors of the population in participatory forms of political organization.

Counterposed against Arafat and his immediate coterie were activists from the Left who sought not just political change, but also social transformation to sustain a confrontation with the Israeli occupation. That approach involved undermining the social bases of notable power, through a process of popular mobilization of grassroots organizations such as student blocs, labor unions, women's committees, agricultural and medical relief committees, and voluntary works organizations.[46] Notwithstanding such claims, the extent to which the nontraditional activists sought to create new political norms, or succeeded in doing so, is questionable.

Yezid Sayigh suggests that the Palestinian Left was no more able than the PLO to construct economic, social, and administrative structures alternative to those under Israeli control. He observes that the Left's stress on income generation and empowerment was also illusory in many cases. The various voluntary and nongovernmental organizations, much like the paternalistic charitable societies they sought to displace, relied almost wholly on external funding. That funding was provided mainly by Western counterparts, international multilateral institutions, and a small number of Arab, Islamic, and Palestinian sources.[47]

In Sayigh's view, ultimate decisionmaking power among such institutions often continued to be held by leaders in exile who utilized these bodies primarily as a means to recruit new members. They pursued factional competition ahead of the requirements of social mobilization and economic development, and continued to stress armed struggle despite its persistent failures.[48]

Neopatrimonialism

Rex Brynen defines neopatrimonialism as the selective dispensing of resources and social regulation through a chain of superior/subordinate

relationships in which those lower down the political hierarchy depend for their position on the leader to whom they owe allegiance, rather than possessing defined powers and functions of their own. Although it is not only evident among Palestinians, the use of neopatrimonialism is a key element in the functioning of Palestinian government and society and the political management of its tensions and contradictions.[49]

From the 1970s onward there was a need to avoid the effective disintegration and collapse of the nationalist effort as a consequence of the tension, discussed above, between, on the one hand, the counterhegemonic thrust of the Palestinian Left and its focus on civil society and, on the other hand, the centralizing political approach of Yasser Arafat.[50] Although much of the perhaps half a billion dollars injected by the PLO into the Occupied Territories between 1977 and 1985 went to support needed infrastructure such as housing, education, and agriculture, a sizable amount was used as patronage money to nationalist institutions and personalities backed by Fatah.[51]

The selective dispensation—essentially by Arafat—of resources and rewards to those who operated within assumptions of elitism and continuing authoritarian leadership was a central feature of the experience of the PLO in Lebanon from 1973 to 1982 and up to and including the transition to Palestinian self-government in the West Bank and Gaza from late 1993.[52] During the Oslo period, Israeli closures of the West Bank and Gaza following terrorist attacks also exacerbated the tendency of the Palestinian Authority to use public-sector employment for both political patronage purposes and job creation.[53] Despite the corrosive impact on the legitimacy of Arafat's leadership of the corruption and maladministration associated with neopatrimonial approaches, such patronage mobilized supporters and counteracted centrifugal political tendencies and challenges to Arafat's authority.

The Intifada and Palestinian Political Dynamics After 1990

It might also be asked what impact the first intifada had upon Palestinian political mythologies, bearing in mind that by the late 1990s the intifada was a more direct experience and memory to the Palestinian population at large than the disastrous refugee outflow of 1948.[54]

The scale of suffering during the intifada was sufficiently horrendous to qualify the uprising as a landmark event in Palestinian mythologies. The respected NGO Save the Children estimated that 50,000 to 63,000 Palestinians below the age of sixteen were injured in the first two years of the uprising.[55] Up to mid-December 1993, 1,183 Palestinians had been killed by

Israelis and 717 Palestinians had been killed by fellow Palestinians since the intifada began.[56] Some 80,000 Palestinians were held in Israeli detention between 1988 and 1994.[57]

The active participation of young Palestinians in daily confrontations with the Israeli army damaged the traditional authority structure in the family and community. Antiauthority attitudes by the young spread to the schools and to society at large. The level of discipline maintained in schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) declined. Teachers, parents, and older people came to feel a sense of powerlessness in the face of a militant young generation.[58]

Sara Roy found that parents in Gaza were particularly concerned over their children's constant exposure to violence. She records the views of one woman as follows:

> These children are the intifada and they have been hurt deeply. The soldiers . . . beat our children and kill them. Our children fear them and hate them. It is different with them than with us. If there is no solution, these children will one day throw more than stones because their hatred is great and they have nothing to hope for. If hope isn't given to them, they will take it from others. They will react with violence. We fear they will take the knives from our kitchens to use as weapons. They have no rules. They do not understand laws. They are going to be wild in the streets. If the world doesn't help us, we will be helpless to control our children.[59]

Despite such concerns, the intifada also produced a new sense of pride and commitment to a cause, and a new and highly effective form of decentralized popular leadership. Palestinian commentators at the time welcomed the relationships of solidarity and mutual support, proximity of political leadership to the grassroots, egalitarianism in social and economic behavior, and democratic and consensus-building decisionmaking.[60] They looked forward to those changes persisting, albeit inevitably to a diminished degree when more normal objective conditions were expected to return.

The non-Fatah PLO factions strongly represented in the refugee camps—as well as important elements of Fatah itself—had adhered throughout the intifada to rejectionist political agendas. They had also demonstrated determination to preserve their political autonomy within tolerated limits. But the intifada could not reverse the fact that the relevance of armed struggle to the PLO's political agenda had already become a matter of discord within the Palestinian political movement.

The pride and sense of anticipation of the intifada experience was doomed, for many, to become frustration. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, the revolution accommodated itself to political circumstances post-Oslo, and its populist leaders in some cases adapted to new realities as the PLO

took over control of the uprising. Many of the key figures during the intifada eventually became linked to the Palestinian Authority, while still others aspired to do so.[61]

Against that complex and often contradictory background, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the intifada had a distinct and enduring impact upon the Palestinian nationalist movement and contributed to the development of Palestinian political mythology. It can be suggested, however, that apart from giving the clearest possible expression to the depth of nationalist feeling and the rejection of Israeli rule among Palestinians, the intifada raised two key political issues of relevance to this study of Palestinian mythologies.

First, it marked the beginning of a shift in the focus of the Palestinian issue away from the external struggle, where it had largely rested since the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan and its subsequent departure from Beirut to Tunis. The intifada made events in the West Bank and Gaza the center of gravity for Palestinian politics, if not the exclusive focus of Palestinian politics and the Israeli-Palestinian struggle.[62] That situation held the potential for progress toward compromise outcomes and long-term stability in relations between Israel and the Palestinians. However, it was to give rise to grave misgivings among those Palestinians who saw their mythologies, aspirations, and interests threatened by the likely consequences of such a shift in focus. Second, and of particular importance for this study because it affected refugees directly, the uprising saw mobilization of the refugee camp populations on an unprecedented scale.

The refugee population, particularly in the camps, initiated the intifada.[63] Israeli data collected during the initial phase of the riots in December 1987 showed that the number of refugees interned in detention centers was double that of indigenous Palestinian residents. Their familiarity with the political situation between Israel and the PLO was minimal. Hardly any of the early detainees of the first intifada appeared familiar with the clauses of the Palestinian National Covenant or knew of its existence. They were unable—or convinced Israelis they were unable—to repeat even common PLO slogans. They were largely unaware of ongoing political events relevant to their situation, such as the resolutions adopted at the Arab League summit in Amman a few weeks earlier.[64] But these ordinary Palestinians were driven by a deep sense of resentment at the indignities of their treatment by Israel. In the words of Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, the early stages of the intifada were fueled by "the fathomless frustration of people trapped by a system that threatened to perpetuate their lowliness and force their children into an equally hopeless future."[65] Their leaders, who were previously largely unknown to the Israelis, strenuously resisted clumsy efforts from the traditional Palestinian elite and the PLO leadership to direct and constrain them. They were quite successful initially in that endeavor, at least

until the demise of the Unified Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) in March 1990, after which the PLO was generally in control of most developments among Palestinians on the ground.[66]

By the end of the intifada, organizations such as the medical and agricultural relief committees, and women's and human rights groups were established and functioning along factional lines.[67] At the time of the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, NGOs reportedly operated about 60 percent of primary health care services, 100 percent of preschool services, 100 percent of disability rehabilitation services, and 30 percent of the educational network in the West Bank and Gaza.[68] Organizations such as the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (MRC) had independent power, both through funding links to international organizations and through community networks.[69]

By the time it ended, therefore, the intifada appeared to have set the scene for an enduring contest of wills that looked likely to include, but also to go beyond, the struggle for an end to Israeli occupation. There was expected to be a contest between, on one side, the centralizing proclivities of the PLO leadership and the political agenda to which it was committed within the framework of the peace process and, on the other side, the well-organized and politically astute groups that claimed to be the defenders at the popular level of a more authentic nationalist cause than the PLO leadership appeared likely to pursue.

In practice, though, the foreshadowed contest between the "internal" Palestinian players and the "external" or "Tunisian" leadership did not amount to much. Growing discontent was evident with the performance of the Palestinian Authority and the painfully slow progress made by Arafat toward establishing and implementing outcomes from the peace process. However, the level of popular support for the political opponents of the Palestinian Authority during the mid-1990s did not appear to increase to any marked extent.

The imagery of the intifada, at its outset, as a largely spontaneous and genuinely popular Palestinian response to their situation initially attracted a strongly positive response among both Arab and Western audiences. That situation also changed, especially after the PLO in Tunis finally established predominant control over the uprising. External Arab support also decreased dramatically, notably in the Gulf states, following Arafat's mishandling of the popular Palestinian response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

It might also be noted in passing that the experience of the intifada did not appear to make much difference in practice to Palestinian women's political, economic, or social power. Women were at the forefront of popular committees providing alternative services in agriculture, education, food storage, and health care, as well as at the forefront of demonstrations,

marches, and other activities.[70] However, although the role of women outside the domestic sphere was enhanced to some extent, the movement was unable to resist their becoming mere extensions of the national political factions. Power struggles among the different factions curtailed their ability to draw in the large majority of Palestinian women who might have wished to be active but who did not wish to be overwhelmed by factional politics.[71]

On balance, therefore, the changes the intifada brought about in terms of the political equation or choices facing the leaderships of both Israel and the PLO were perhaps more extensive than the intifada's long-term impact in terms of Palestinian political culture at the popular level. The integrative and reformative political effects of the uprising proved to be less sustainable than those who welcomed them had initially hoped. So long as the PLO provided the "state" until 1993, and under the Palestinian Authority led by Arafat after 1994, the availability of financial and other material resources, including external resources, made it relatively easy for authoritarian leadership to maintain its dominance over the nationalist movement.[72]

If anything, the intifada may have served to widen rather than diminish the gap in Palestinian society between those who possessed and those who lacked access to the benefits of power and influence. And so far as the substance of the outcomes achieved through the intifada are concerned, the basic imbalances of power between Palestinians and Israel did not change. In the words of Maya Rosenfeld,

> When one inspects the course of events and developments that succeeded the uprising—especially the imbalance in the terms of the Oslo Accords, the political and economic weakness and fragility of the [Palestinian National Authority] and the absence of international guarantees for Palestinian sovereignty—it is hard to escape the notion that, in the competition between structural determination and human agency, it is the former that outweighs the latter.[73]

Mythologies, Countermythologies, and Alternative Interpretations

It was noted in Chapter 1 that the pragmatic manipulation of imagery for political purposes during the 1990s contributed to a culture of political cynicism at the popular level among both Palestinians and Israelis, especially toward the claims of political leaders. Among the factors encouraging such cynicism during the Oslo period were perceived gaps between promise and performance. Widespread perceptions of corruption in Palestinian Authority institutions, including ministries and government offices, the security forces, and within the office of the president, certainly had that effect.[74]

Awareness of the constraints imposed by larger agendas—and sometimes the comfort derived from objectifying politicians as self-seeking and unreliable—also decreased the effectiveness of efforts at the government level to manipulate imagery for political ends.

Among the Palestinian public there was a tendency, sometimes misplaced, to see strong criticism by Palestinian officials of Israeli policies as a prelude to concessions. Amira Hass has described how the Palestinian target audience was well aware of the frequent disparity between discussions in Israel–Palestinian Authority liaison committees and the sharp criticisms leveled by Palestinian personalities in the media against the Israeli dialogue partners or the policies they were implementing. From the cynical popular perspective, she argued, the more outspoken the declarations of the Palestinian side, the greater the concessions that were in prospect. And given the Palestinian Authority's weakness in the face of effectively enforced Israeli rule, it was widely believed that the Israeli authorities were determined to continue dispossessing Palestinians of more land, to make life difficult for them, and to thwart any possibility of sovereign, independent Palestinian existence.[75]

There was also a tendency among Palestinian political audiences to balance formal appearances, especially the statements of government figures, against what might be described as the "everyone knows" alternative interpretation syndrome. The identity of "everyone" was, of course, very imprecise. The evidence for the views held under this heading was normally speculative and inferential at best. Such interpretations could be based on rumors and gossip, and be driven by personal agendas to a very considerable degree. But such speculation was a fact of Palestinian political life. It was nourished by the limited credibility of political leaderships.

For example, in relation to certain comments attributed to Abdallah al-Hurani, special adviser to Arafat on refugee affairs in the Palestinian Authority, Hass observed:

> [Everyone] knows that Abdallah al-Hurani . . . , quoted in the Israeli press as someone who compares Israel to the Crusaders, is a refugee from the village of Samiya. Everyone also knows that shortly after Arafat appointed him as an adviser, he was relieved of any real power. He was left with words only. His words cannot even come to the aid of Samiya natives trapped in the Gaza Strip who do not receive exit permits from Israeli authorities.[76]

In the sort of environment in which political myths flourished while access to reliable information was limited, similar remarks were made from time to time in regard to almost any prominent Palestinian political figure around Arafat. Recalling Helmreich's comments, mentioned earlier, about the connection between stress and the lowering of self-esteem and the influ-

ence of peer groups, widely divergent interpretations of particular events during the 1990s were perhaps inevitable.

Some elements of popular mythologies were more solidly based in facts than others. But even where popular perceptions and assumptions concerning dealings between the Palestinian leadership and Israelis were far removed from reality, the degree of credibility accorded to such perceptions by wider political audiences meant that those perceptions could not be simply ignored.

Conspiracy Theories

Fascination with conspiracy theories is a Middle East phenomenon. In the Palestinian context, where the state is weak and the power of informal networks is correspondingly strong, there is a tendency for perceptions of external parties to be rooted in myths and presumptions about the objectives of others, including Israel, the United States, and other donor countries.

The roles played by outside parties in the region—partly in response to the Arab-Israel conflict—have not always been as benign in their effects, or as sensitive to the rights and dignity of others, as those affected by their intervention might have hoped.[77] However, the degree of attraction exerted by conspiracy theories as explanations of the presumed motives of external parties clearly has origins in deeper social and psychological factors.

During the 1990s, for all their improbability at times to outside observers, many Palestinians appear to find in conspiracy theories a form of intellectual escapism that was more comfortable to live with than the more mundane complexities and realities of routine decisionmaking on issues affecting them. Attachment to Palestinian mythology regarding external conspiracies was perhaps a coping mechanism for those who witnessed and experienced what the Palestinians themselves acknowledged as the organizational weaknesses of the Palestinian political leadership—or what prominent Fatah Central Council member Khalid al-Hassan has described as a genius for failure because of leanings toward "monopoly, arrogance, suspicion and accusation, and so towards chaos, confusion, ignorance, failure, defeats, and further repression, jails, and intellectual and mental blockage."[78] As Yezid Sayigh has observed, those weaknesses included resistance to teamwork and contingency planning, a tendency to adversarial internal relations and patron-client relations, distrust of information from any but subservient sources, and disinclination to subject information to analytical processing.[79]

For some Palestinians also, conspiracy theories appeared to provide a sense of being central to someone's attention. Even if it was usually thought to be a malevolent interest, that perception still provided a measure of reas-

surance that they were important somewhere in the scheme of things. In addition to mobilizing support for particular interests or causes, conspiracy theories also bolstered a self-image of being victims who deserved redress. As will be discussed later, refugee reaction to the UNRWA financial crisis of 1997 reflected this intermingling of aspirations, fears, and identity very clearly.[80]

The appeal of conspiracy theories at the popular level, as well as among well-educated and sophisticated interlocutors, and the "everyone knows" syndrome, added to the fragility of Palestinian confidence in their political institutions and leaders. They were also associated with a disposition, among many Arab intellectuals and among wider Arab audiences, to see Israel as a country with a drive for power and an instinctive will to achieve security through regional economic and political hegemony.[81] It was widely assumed in the Arab world that Israel still enjoyed the support of key Western countries for its supposed territorial ambitions.[82]

The tendency of the Palestinian narrative to focus on absolving the Palestinians from responsibility for their own fate has been criticized earlier.[83] But even if both conspiracy theories and the "everyone knows" phenomenon encouraged delusions, and not only at popular levels, it was nevertheless the case that they also allowed some degree of deniability of the unpalatable. For all those reasons, conspiracy theories were, and are likely to remain, a deeply embedded part of Palestinian political culture.

The importance of that point, at least so far as this study of political mythologies is concerned, is that any decisions by the United States or Israel concerning the Palestinians in the context of a peace process, or for that matter, by donor countries concerning UNRWA, were bound to be seen as projections of power in pursuit of perceived political objectives. And as Peter Black and Kevin Avruch have observed, because power projected cross-culturally is doubly constituted—once in its projection, and again in its reception—the likelihood of mutual misunderstanding between external parties and refugees was high.[84]

Illustrating that point, as will be discussed in more detail in later chapters, the nature of the 1997 crisis in UNRWA was understood among Palestinian refugees as reflecting a malevolent interest on the part of donors, and Israel, in determining the direction of political events in which UNRWA and they were a key part. The refugees themselves were not, at any stage, party to the events and decisions affecting them, and they had no reason to believe that their concerns were unfounded. In contrast, from a donor perspective, the crisis revolved around a relatively routine or even mundane decision of whether to grant or to withhold the financial resources required for UNRWA to operate at the level it deemed necessary. The donors did not, and perhaps could not, engage in meaningful discussion with the refugees to address their very different perceptions of the situation.

External Perceptions

The impact of external parties' own perceptions and preconceptions, in this case in relation to the refugee issue and the political and humanitarian situation facing the refugees as a community, should also be noted briefly. Imagery and established notions can have a strong influence on the political decisionmaking process among external parties, especially where individuals are seen by external parties to rely on their resources. Palestinian refugees in the 1990s were notably successful in using the imagery of their dependency upon external assistance to exploit donor goodwill, as well as notions of moral and political obligation. Among some donors, there was perhaps a tendency, arising from their superior power, toward a deep if largely unconscious ethnocentrism that encouraged decisionmakers both to objectify refugees and at the same time to be averse to withholding support to them.[85]

For their part, as discussed in the next chapter, Palestinians in general, and Palestinian refugees in particular, were tenacious in defending their identity, perceived rights, and political mythologies against real or imagined external challenges. That included, especially, circumstances where the external evaluation of the economic conditions facing refugee populations, and the advancing of proposals to address that situation, raised sensitive political issues. And no less in the Palestinian political theater than in many others, sympathetic audiences were often willing to cooperate by acting in a respectful fashion toward such role-playing.[86]

Moreover, at least in regard to the case of the Palestinian refugees, external parties possessed widely varying degrees of knowledge of the Palestinian political situation on the ground. They were generally predisposed to be sympathetic to the refugees' socioeconomic situation. Ultimately, many of those countries, including Western donor countries, were open to influence through carefully orchestrated presentation of the refugees' case, not as statistics but as the human face of conflict in the region. Seemingly unstructured personal contacts with refugees by visiting political figures, especially in the emotive circumstances of selected camp environments, could at times have considerable impact on those visitors.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion suggests that political mythologies in the Palestinian context, including especially the refugee context, during the 1990s need to be seen as more than part of a process of ongoing interaction between Palestinians and Israelis. They were shaped significantly by that process, of course, including the experiences of individuals encountering

Israelis under stressful conditions—as was almost invariably the case. However, Palestinian refugee mythologies were also affected by more complex perceptions of the agendas, intentions, and interests of fellow Palestinians, donor countries, and other parties.

Bearing in mind Helmreich's conclusions about stress and receptivity to advice, the changing balances of political power between internal and external players in Palestinian politics after the intifada, the "everyone knows" principle, and the Palestinian passion for conspiracy theories, the credibility of the Palestinian leadership was bound to be quite limited. Its interests and objectives were widely perceived ultimately to be coterminous with those of Israel. Moreover, the process of peacebuilding to which it was formally committed was not producing the positive outcomes most Palestinians had hoped to see.

In addition, the leadership itself was perceived within Palestinian society to be abusing the hopes, if not the trust, placed upon it. In the absence of credible leadership, measured in terms of both concrete achievements in regard to core issues with Israel and the probity and efficiency of the Palestinian Authority's own performance, the potency of existing folk mythologies and therefore the resistance of Palestinian society to change were bound to be reinforced.

Notes

1. For discussion of the concept of political culture, see Lucian W. Pye, *Politics, Personality, and Nation-Building: Burma's Search for Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. xvi; Lucian W. Pye, "Political Culture Revisited," *Political Psychology* 12, no. 3 (September 1991), pp. 487–508; and Donald L. M. Blackmer, "Introduction: An Appreciation of Lucian W. Pye," in Richard J. Samuels and Myron Weiner, eds., *The Political Culture of Foreign Area and International Studies: Essays in Honor of Lucian W. Pye* (New York: Brassey's, 1992), pp. xiii–xvi. See also Dominique Jacquin, Andrew Oros, and Marco Verweij, eds., "Culture in International Relations: An Introduction to the Special Issue," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 22, no. 3 (1993), pp. 375–376.

2. Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 194.

3. For an excellent overview of the early Zionist movement and the evolution of attitudes to the Arab population of Palestine, see David J. Goldberg, *To the Promised Land: A History of Zionist Thought from Its Origins to the Modern State of Israel* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), esp. pp. 158–172.

4. Ibid., p. 164.

5. Simha Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians, 1917–1947* (London: Croon Helm, 1979), p. 96.

6. Writing in 1990, Benny Morris suggested that until 1977, Jabotinsky's Revisionists, whom he described as "unpragmatic, right-wing deviants from the mainstream of the Zionist experience," were placed on the fringe of Zionist and Israeli history, but since then "their vision, albeit in diluted form, has dominated the political

arena in Jerusalem." Benny Morris, *1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 6.

7. Jabotinsky spoke of his violent dislike for the Orient: "The East: it is entirely foreign to me . . . mine is a Westerner's mentality. . . . And the mob! a sort of permanent row of a yelling rabble, dressed up in savage-painted rugs!" Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians,* p. 114. To be fair, Jabotinsky's views of Arabs were hardly unusual at the time, including in non-Jewish Western circles. For a distasteful display of unbridled racism from a New Zealand chaplain to the Australian and New Zealand (ANZAC) expeditionary force in Egypt during World War I, see Guy Thornton, *With the ANZACs in Cairo: The Tale of a Great Fight* (London: H. R. Allenson, 1918[?]), pp. 34–45.

8. Ze'ev Jabotinsky, *Writings: On the Road to Statehood* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1959), pp. 260–266, cited in Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 15. Jabotinsky did not spell out what he had in mind by "national rights," but according to Shlaim he appears to have been thinking of political autonomy for the Palestinians within a Jewish state.

9. Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians,* p. 117.

10. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall,* p. 19.

11. Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians,* pp. 121–123.

12. Ibid., p. 97.

13. Ze'ev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State,* translated by David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 332.

14. Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 1–2.

15. Ibid., p. 1. See also Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1998), p. 18.

16. Meron Benvenisti, "Peace Process and Intercommunal Strife," in Judith Kipper and Harold Saunders, eds., *The Middle East in Global Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), p. 53. Meron Benvenisti has noted certain common elements between the Palestinian and Irish experiences, in that the root of their respective conflicts lies, in both places, in the struggle between an immigrant community and a local community who viewed the settlement of the immigrants as a violent and unjust violation of their territory. Meron Benvenisti, "Belfast and Jerusalem," *Ha'aretz* (English edition), 7 May 1998.

17. Uri Savir, *The Process: 1,100 Days That Changed the Middle East* (New York: Random House, 1998), p. 207.

18. The depth of this problem is captured well by Norman Finkelstein, writing on Palestinian attitudes based on his experiences in Beit Sahur during the Gulf crisis of 1990–1991. He writes: "'So why did you cheer the Scud missiles?' I asked Qa'id, an agricultural engineer, again. We were speaking in Fawwar, the refugee camp near Hebron where he lived. Outside, Israeli soldiers were passing through in a jeep, announcing yet another curfew as they shot teargas canisters and sound bombs into houses. Everyone in the room was hugging the wall. Everyone, that is, except a three-year-old standing on the window sill and shouting 'Stone them!' as she shook her fist. Qa'id replied that the Scud attacks were the first time he saw panic in the eyes of the Israelis. 'I wanted them to feel the same panic they caused me.' Musa's six-year-old daughter, Marwa, said that she was 'happy Saddam sent missiles to Israel because Israel killed many of us, sent Baba (Daddy) to prison and beat us.' Musa . . . had served three 6-month stints of administrative detention (once apparently for keeping me as a guest) and had been repeatedly humiliated, beaten

and tortured." Norman Finkelstein, "Reflections on Palestinian Attitudes During the Gulf War," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 3 (Spring 1992), pp. 54–55.

19. Robert Bowker, *Beyond Peace: The Search for Security in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996), pp. 34–35.

20. For a poignant account of such challenges among seven Israeli and Palestinian children in Jerusalem, see the film *Promises,* made by B. Z. Goldberg and Justine Shapiro, 2001.

21. Ahmad Khalidi, *Gaza/Jericho and the Uncertain Prospects for Peace,* Royal Institute of International Affairs Middle East Programme Briefing Paper no. 8, April 1994, p. 5.

22. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity,* p. 5. For a powerful account of the realities of Palestinian frustration on the eve of the intifada, see Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising—Israel's Third Front* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), pp. 81–87.

23. The reality of indignity and frustration is described effectively in Ewen MacAskill, "Building Unbearable Lives," *Guardian Weekly,* 18–24 January 2001.

24. Maya Rosenfeld, "Power Structure, Agency, and Family in a Palestinian Refugee Camp," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 3 (August 2002), p. 546. For a brief but useful overview of the characteristics of Palestinian society before 1948, see Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 11–15.

25. Marianne Heiberg and Geir Ovensen, *Palestinian Society in Gaza, West Bank, and Arab Jerusalem: A Survey of Living Conditions,* FAFO Report no. 151, Oslo, 1993, p. 147.

26. Rosenfeld, "Power Structure, Agency, and Family," p. 546.

27. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Warner Books, 1991), p. 2.

28. Elia Zureik, "Twentieth Century Palestinian Class Structure," in Khalil Nakhleh and Elia Zureik, eds., *The Sociology of the Palestinians* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 52–58.

29. Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1997), p. 57.

30. Journalist Thomas Friedman has pointed out that in the Middle East people who have never wielded power have illusions about how much those who have power can really achieve. Thomas Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (London: Collins, 1990), pp. 207–209.

31. Glenn E. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 1–2.

32. For a discussion of the opposition of the Palestinian peasantry during the Arab revolt of 1936–1939 to the British and the Zionists and the urban landowning Palestinian elite, see ibid., pp. 51–52.

33. See Emile Sahliyeh, *In Search of Leadership: West Bank Politics Since 1967* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1988).

34. See, among others, Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples;* Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967,* updated ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Ahmad Shboul, "Arab Society and Culture: Burdens of the Past, Challenges of the Future," *Voices* (National Library of Australia) 3, no. 2 (Winter 1993), pp. 5–13.

35. Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples,* p. 399.

36. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State,* p. x.

37. For a suggestion that the attempt to install the Village Leagues was linked to a request from King Hussein to then–Israeli defense minister Yitzhak Rabin to help establish an alternative pro-Hussein leadership in the West Bank to contain anti-Jordanian activity there, see Samuel Segev, *Crossing the Jordan: Israel's Hard Road to Peace* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 340–342.

38. Stanley Reed, "Jordan and the Gulf Crisis," *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 5 (Winter 1990–1991), pp. 21–35.

39. Judith Miller, *God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), pp. 345–346.

40. Palestinian private universities established in the West Bank during the 1970s were Bir Zeit (1972), Bethlehem (1973), Al-Najah (1977), Al-Khalil (Hebron) (1979), and Al-Quds (1980). The Islamic University was established in Gaza in 1978.

41. The five founders of Fatah, including Arafat, also came from upper-middle-class families "on the edge of notability." Said K. Aburish, *A Brutal Friendship: The West and the Arab Elite* (London: Indigo, 1997), pp. 166–167.

42. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* p. 54.

43. Aburish, *A Brutal Friendship,* p. 178.

44. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* p. 612.

45. Rex Brynen, "The Dynamics of Palestinian Elite Formation," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1995), p. 38.

46. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State,* pp. x–xi.

47. Rex Brynen similarly concluded that external, rather than Palestinian, financial support played an important part in the rapid growth of factional organization within the student, women's, and trade union movements in the period between the destruction of the PLO infrastructure in Lebanon in 1982 and the start of the intifada in late 1987. Rex Brynen, "The Neopatrimonial Dimension of Palestinian Politics," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 1 (Autumn 1995), p. 29.

48. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* p. 613.

49. Brynen, "The Neopatrimonial Dimension of Palestinian Politics," pp. 24–25. See also Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* pp. 454–463.

50. Graham Usher, *Palestine in Crisis: The Struggle for Peace and Political Independence After Oslo* (London: Pluto Press in association with Transnational Institute [TNI] and Middle East Research and Information Project [MERIP], 1995), p. 46.

51. Brynen, "The Neopatrimonial Dimension of Palestinian Politics," pp. 28–29.

52. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* pp. 454–463; Brynen "The Neopatrimonial Dimension of Palestinian Politics," pp. 23–36.

53. Rex Brynen, *Reconstructing Afghanistan: Lessons from Donor Assistance to Palestine,* paper presented to the Middle East Studies Association Conference, Washington, DC, November 2002, p. 9.

54. Although 64 percent of the population in Gaza and 27 percent in the West Bank in 1995 were descendants of refugees, by 1995 perhaps only 3 percent of the population of the West Bank and 6 percent in Gaza were first-generation refugees. Are Hovdenak, Jon Pedersen, Dag H. Tuastad, and Elia Zureik, *Constructing Order: Palestinian Adaptations to Refugee Life,* FAFO Report no. 236, Oslo, 1997, p. 12, quoting a PCBS/FAFO survey in 1995.

55. Anne Elizabeth Nixon, *The Status of Palestinian Children During the Uprising in the Occupied Territories,* Jerusalem, January 1990, p. 5., cited in Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State,* p. 39.

56. Figures provided by the Embassy of Israel, Canberra.

57. Brynen, "The Dynamics of Palestinian Elite Formation," p. 43.

58. Elia Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996), p. 48.

59. Sarah Roy, "Changing Political Attitudes Among Gaza Refugees," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 19, no. 1 (1989), p. 78.

60. George T. Abed, "The Political Economy of Resistance," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2, no. 1 (1989), p. 57.

61. For a strong critique of the growth of alienation between the Palestinian political leadership and its mass audience, see Danny Rubinstein, "Why Arafat Didn't Start the Latest Violence," *The Age,* 11 November 2000.

62. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity,* p. 200.

63. Schiff and Ya'ari, *Intifada,* p. 85.

64. Ibid., pp. 81–87.

65. Ibid., p. 80.

66. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State,* p. 97.

67. Brynen, "The Neopatrimonial Dimension of Palestinian Politics," p. 32.

68. Mustafa Barghouti, "Aid to Arafat Hurts Ordinary Palestinians," *Wall Street Journal,* 30 August 1994.

69. See Denis J. Sullivan, "NGOs in Palestine: Agents of Development and Foundation of Civil Society," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 93–100.

70. Usher, *Palestine in Crisis,* p. 53.

71. Rita Giacaman, "Palestinian Women in the Uprising," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2, no. 1 (1989), p. 141. Reinforcing Giacaman's assessment of the potency of factional approaches, a campaign launched in October 1993 to educate women to judge the four main PLO factions on the basis of their political and social policies for women was thwarted by factional conflict between supporters and opponents of the Declaration of Principles. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) activist Suha Barghouti dismissed such concerns, however, arguing that "support or opposition to the [Declaration of Principles] has become the defining factor. It is impossible to divide the larger political situation from the women's question." Suha Barghouti, "Autonomy Does Not Respect Women's Rights," *Challenge,* July–August 1994, quoted in Usher, *Palestine in Crisis,* p. 55.

72. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* p. 667.

73. Rosenfeld, "Power Structure, Agency, and Family," p. 546.

74. See, for example, Center for Palestine Research and Studies (CPRS), Public Opinion Poll no. 40, 15–17 April 1999, dealing with the peace process, evaluation of Palestinian Authority performance, corruption, and other issues. See also Danny Rubinstein, "Protection Racket, PA-style," *Ha'aretz,* 12 November 1999.

75. Amira Hass, "The Recourse of the Weak," *Ha'aretz* (English edition), 7 October 1998.

76. Ibid.

77. Bernard Lewis, "Rethinking the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 4 (Fall 1992), p. 115. For analysis of the way in which experiences of interaction with the West have shaped Islamic perspectives, see the excellent analysis of contemporary Islamic issues in Graham Fuller and Ian Lesser, *A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995); and comments by John Esposito regarding Islamic Jihad and other radical Islamic groups in Egypt in John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 135.

78. Khalid al-Hassan, *'Abqariyyat al-fashal* (The genius of failure), Political Papers no. 10, Dar al-Karmil for Samid, Amman, 1987, pp. 148–149, cited in Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* p. 687.

79. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* p. 687.

80. See, for example, Ali al-Jarbawi, "Ala' min yajib al-nutliq al-siham?" (Against whom should we aim our arrows?), opinion column appearing in *Al-Ayyam,* 30 August 1997, and in *Al-Rai,* 1 September 1997.

81. That perception was strengthened during the early 1950s when Israeli prime minister David Ben Gurion, taking the view that Israel could only find security in an implacably hostile Arab environment through the deterrent effect of repeated and vigorous application of force, deliberately reinforced fear of Israeli intentions by harsh retaliatory actions against minor incursions from Jordan and Egypt. He also took unilateral actions against Syria. See Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 31–52. See also Shlaim, *The Iron Wall,* pp. 54–217. Ben Gurion also entertained notions of dismantling Lebanon, annexing the south, and helping create a Christian-Maronite state in the remainder that would be allied to Israel. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall,* pp. 106, 133–134.

82. For a comprehensive examination of the notion of a Greater Israel among Arab countries, see Daniel Pipes, "Imperial Israel: The Nile to Euphrates Calumny," *Middle East Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (March 1994), pp. 29–39. See also Geoffrey Kemp, *The Control of the Middle East Arms Race* (New York: St. Martin's Press in association with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1991), pp. 22–25.

83. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity,* pp. 192–201.

84. Peter Black and Kevin Avruch, "Culture, Power, and International Negotiations: Understanding Palau-U.S. Status Negotiations," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 22, no. 3 (1993), p. 382.

85. Ibid., p. 385. As Robert Park has noted, "[E]veryone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role [and] it is in these roles that we know each other; and it is in these roles that we know ourselves." Robert E. Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1950), p. 249.

86. Erving Goffman ascribes this behavior to "awed regard for the sacred integrity imputed to performers." Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin Press, 1969), p. 60. Emile Durkheim, in a similar vein, has suggested that the human personality is "a sacred thing; one does not violate it or infringe its bounds, while at the same time the greatest good is in communion with others." Emile Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy,* translated by D. F. Pocock (London: Cohen and West, 1953), p. 37.

3

Refugees

Those [Palestinians] who left in 1948, and especially those who still live in the slums that are called refugee camps, exist in an environment of intense indoctrination and political zeal whose obsession—the return—does not give way easily in a confrontation with pragmatism.

—David Shipler, *Arab and Jew*

The Palestinians are making use of the ancient Jewish strategy of exile and have removed themselves from history. They close their eyes against harsh reality, and stubbornly clamping down their eyelids, they fabricate their Promised Land. "Next year in Jerusalem," said the Jews in Latvia and in Cracow and San'a, and the meaning was that they were not going to compromise. Because they had no hope for any real change. He who has nothing to lose can demand everything; and until his Jerusalem becomes real, he will do nothing to bring it closer. And here also that absolute demand: everything. Nablus and Hebron and Jaffa and Jerusalem. And in the meantime—nothing. In the meantime, abandoned physically and spiritually. In the meantime, a dream and a void.

—David Grossman, *The Yellow Wind*

Understanding the impact of memories and mythologies on the Palestinian refugee issue requires more than an understanding of the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It also requires an understanding of the political culture of Palestinian refugee society and its interaction with nonrefugee Palestinians. This chapter provides an overview of the nature of Palestinian refugee society, especially among camp-dwelling refugees.

Almost 3.9 million Palestinian refugees were registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in June 2001 (see Table 3.1). However, UNRWA acknowledges that the number of registered refugees present in the agency's area of operations is almost certainly less than the population recorded.[1] The total number of refugees may be close to 4.9 million, of whom about one-third live in the West Bank and Gaza, slightly more than one-third in Jordan, and 17 percent in Syria and Lebanon. A further 15 percent are spread among other Arab and Western countries.[2] They, together with the Palestinians who were

Table 3.1 Distribution of Palestinian Refugee Population Registered with UNRWA (as of 30 June 2001)

Field	Registered Population	Number of Camps	Total Camp Population	Registered Persons Not in Camps	Percentage of Population Not in Camps
Jordan	1,639,718	10	287,951	1,351,767	82.44
Lebanon	382,973	12	214,728	168,245	43.93
Syrian Arab Republic	391,651	10	109,466	282,185	72.05
West Bank	607,770	19	163,139	444,631	73.16
Gaza	852,626	8	460,031	392,595	46.05
Total	3,874,738	59	1,235,315	2,639,423	68.19

Source: United Nations, *Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 2000–30 June 2001*, UN General Assembly Official Records, 56th sess., supp. 13 (A/56/13), p. 54.

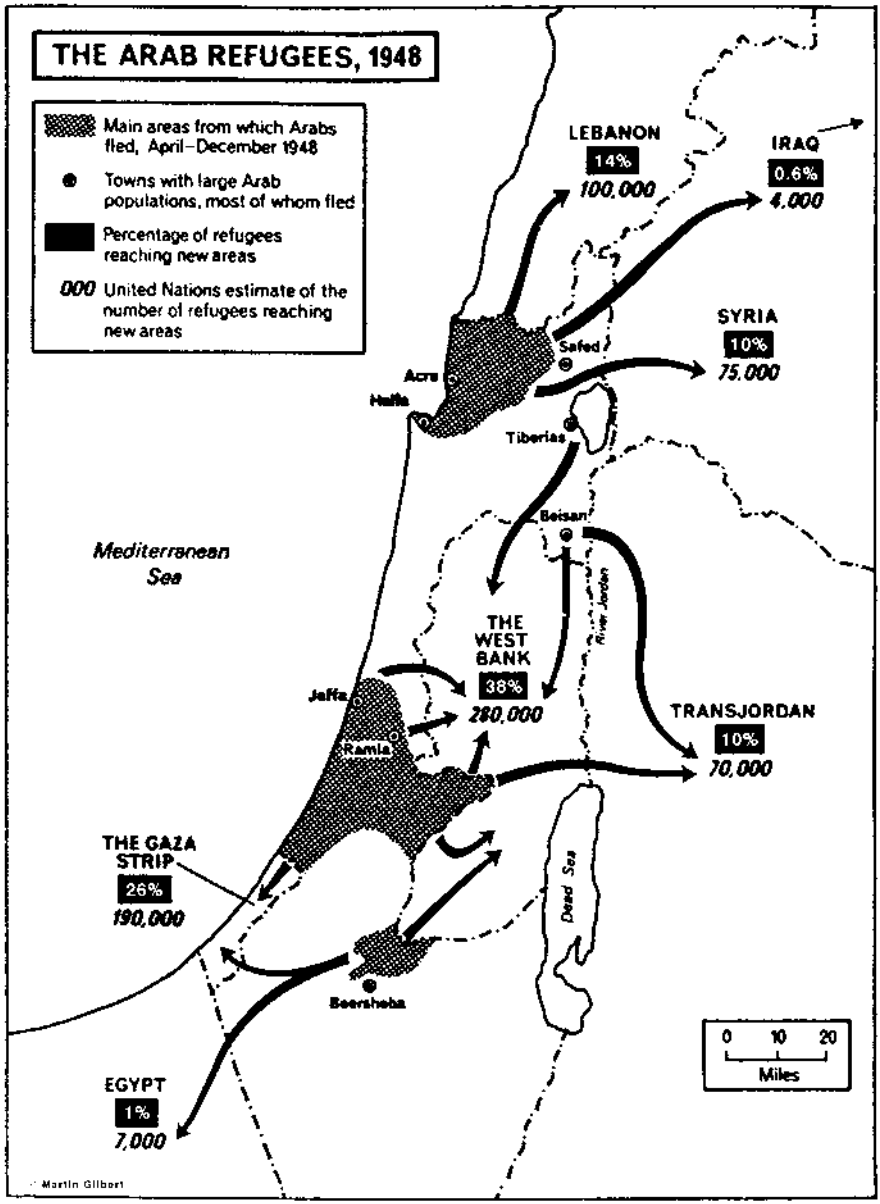
Note: Figures are based on UNRWA registration records, which are updated continuously. However, UNRWA acknowledges that the number of registered refugees present in its area of operations is almost certainly less than the population recorded.

displaced by the 1967 war between Israel and the Arab states and the descendants of that group, constitute one of the largest single concentrations of stateless persons anywhere.[3]

Approximately 1 million refugees have no form of identification apart from their UNRWA identification card, meaning they are not legally the responsibility, nor under the protection, of any individual state.[4] They are also one of the fastest-growing refugee communities worldwide. Using an average growth rate of 4 percent for Palestinians throughout the Middle East, a RAND estimate suggests that the overall Palestinian population will increase to 9 million by the year 2010, from approximately 6 million in 1995.[5]

The first and most significant of the waves of refugees created by the Arab-Israeli conflict arose during the course of 1948. It numbered, according to UN estimates (which some Palestinian scholars consider too low), 726,000 people, or about two-thirds of the total Palestinian population of 1.2 million at the time. The second wave came in the 1967 war, when 323,000 Palestinians became homeless, 113,000 of whom were already refugees from 1948.[6] By the mid-1990s, according to one estimate, descendants of the 1948 refugees outnumbered those original refugees by at least seven to one.[7]

Israel has so far refused to allow the return to Israel of any but a small number of refugees, mainly in the 1950s in the context of family reunification. If one accepts Israeli claims that 88,000 people were allowed into the West Bank under a family reunification scheme from 1967 to 1994, this



Reprinted from Martin Gilbert, *Atlas of the Arab-Israel Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 47.

would equate to allowing an average of 3,251 people to return each year.[8] In addition, under the Oslo Accords 45,000–50,000 people returned to Gaza and the West Bank as members and family of the security forces of the Palestinian Authority.[9]

At the July 2000 Camp David summit between Chairman Arafat, Prime Minister Barak, and President Clinton, Barak was reportedly prepared to countenance, as part of a comprehensive deal, the return under family reunion provisions (that is, not as a matter of right) of up to 100,000 refugees to Israel proper.[10] In a further development, discussed in Chapter 4, negotiators for the two sides meeting at Taba, Egypt, in January 2001 explored the possibility of reaching an "agreed narrative" and an agreed approach aimed at defusing the issue and yet protecting the Jewish identity of Israel.[11]

Despite the fact that the Palestinian refugee experience is part of general Palestinian political consciousness, the precise nature of the relationship between Palestinian refugees and nonrefugees is inadequately understood. Mapping the political relationship between Palestinian refugees and nonrefugees is made more difficult because that relationship operates on a variety of levels and poses the problem, mentioned earlier, of communication gaps between elites and nonelites in Palestinian society.

Palestinians, whether refugees or nonrefugees, share what Bernard Lewis refers to as the primary identities of blood (family, clan, tribe, and ultimately ethnic nationality), place (village, neighborhood, city, country), and religion, which in the case of the Palestinians is predominantly Sunni Islam.[12] Accordingly, one of the constraints facing any analysis of Palestinian refugees is the difficulty of separating out their situation from that of other Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as from local populations in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

The relationship between refugee camps and refugee identity is also a politically sensitive issue. The role that the camp environment itself has played directly in the shaping of refugee identity is difficult to determine precisely, but as will be discussed, the camps—and the provision of UNRWA services within them—are believed by Palestinians and also by critics of UNRWA to make a unique contribution to sustaining that identity.[13]

Palestinian Refugee Identity: The Imagined Community

There is no accepted definition of who are considered to be Palestinian refugees for legal purposes.[14] The term is generally applied, however, to those Arab citizens of Mandate Palestine who fled that part of Mandate Palestine that in 1948 became the state of Israel and who were subsequently

prevented from returning there. Those who fled from the West Bank during the 1967 war are generally referred to as displaced persons, rather than as refugees, although as mentioned earlier there were some 113,000 1948 refugees among them.

Lex Takkenberg has noted that UNRWA instructions concerning refugee registration were developed for operational reasons at the time of its establishment rather than as a considered attempt to deal with the legal, political, and humanitarian complexities involved. They define Palestinian refugees in the following terms: "Palestine refugee: shall mean any person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict."[15]

Eligibility for registration with UNRWA for the purpose of obtaining services from the agency within its area of operations was limited to those who could produce documentary evidence of being Palestine refugees, as defined above. Eligibility for registration as refugees also extended to the descendants of fathers fulfilling that definition, and to the descendants of fathers registered with UNRWA of a limited number of other special categories, mentioned below.[16]

The descendants of those who left in 1948 were included because the defining characteristics of refugee status in general—inability to return (except in small numbers in the context of family reunification) and lack of national protection by the government of the country of origin—also applied to them. The principle, recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), of upholding family unity was also relevant.[17]

The special categories accepted under the UNRWA approach ("Gaza poor" in Gaza; "Jerusalem poor" in the West Bank; "frontier villagers" in the West Bank and in Jordan; and "members of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes") enabled the definition of refugees to include residents of the border villages in the West Bank who lost their agricultural land in the war of 1948, and therefore their livelihood, but remained in their villages. It also covered residents of the Gaza Strip refugee camps who were either relocated on the Egyptian (Rafah) side of the boundary or found themselves separated from their families as a result of the border demarcation after the Camp David Agreement between Israel and Egypt. Palestinian Bedouin who were forcibly removed from their grazing lands within the state of Israel, as well as those who were induced to abandon the West Bank and relocate in Jordan, were also included.[18]

The UNRWA definition of refugee status has been viewed among some Palestinians as unreasonably narrow in its scope. However, the definition has continued, in the words of Salim Tamari, "to capture a combination of need (though outmoded) with the basic requirement of a political resolution of refugee status, while taking into account refugee aspirations."[19]

In practice, the refugee sense of self, as distinct from the formal definition of Palestinian refugee identity, is inseparable from the historical loss of homes and means of earning a livelihood, which, as noted above, are the factors accepted by UNRWA for registration purposes. Ultimately, Palestinian refugee identity at an individual level derives from consciousness of the historical and political environment and from the social and other factors through which that consciousness is shaped.

The refugee sense of identity is further reinforced by geographic proximity to the former Palestinian homeland.[20] Palestinian researcher Salman Abu-Sitta estimates that 86 percent of Palestinian refugees live within a 100-mile radius of pre-1948 Palestine.[21]

At one level, it is anomalous that the fifty-nine Palestinian refugee camps currently recognized by UNRWA remain the most salient symbol among refugees, Palestinians, and external parties more generally of Palestinian refugee landlessness and exile. According to UNRWA estimates, in the West Bank in mid-1998, of 555,057 registered refugees or 30 percent of the total population, 408,042 or 73.51 percent of the refugee population lived *outside* the nineteen refugee camps in that field. In the Gaza Strip, of a total number of 772,653 registered refugees, 348,772 or 45.14 percent lived *outside* the eight camps. The percentages of registered refugees *not* living in camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria were about 82 percent, 45 percent, and 71 percent, respectively. And yet, even though Palestinians dwelling in camps are a majority of the refugee population only in Gaza and Lebanon, the Palestinian refugee camps provide the public face of the Palestinian cause.[22]

Some commentators are inclined to see the continuing existence of the camps, and UNRWA's role in them, as factors that contribute directly and substantially to the continuation of Palestinian dreams of return, rather than acceptance by refugees of assimilation into other Arab countries.[23] Both Israel and, at times, Arab governments have also accused UNRWA of nourishing an environment in camps conducive to political and military activism.[24] Refugees indirectly lend weight to that view, through attaching considerable importance to the continuation of UNRWA services in camps and in other refugee neighborhoods, and through refusing formally to accept the principle of local integration.

It is certainly the case that the social and political characteristics of the camps make them environments in which dreams may be preserved. However, as I argue below, the differences between refugees and nonrefugees in Palestinian society, let alone between Palestinian refugees and the societies of neighboring Arab states, make highly questionable the notion that removing the refugee camps would expedite the integration and ultimately the assimilation of the refugees into their host societies.[25] Such a perception begs the question of whether local integration is, or ever was, a viable option for the vast majority of the refugee population.

Studies prepared by FAFO (the Norwegian Institute for Applied Social Science) in 1994 and 1997 demonstrate that refugees in camps have a very specific identity in Palestinian society.[26] And Palestinian refugees in general possess a sense of imagined community, in that the community is defined not by geographic space but rather by the creation and reproduction of a social organization or networks not located in a specific place. To an outside observer of the seemingly strife-ridden nature of Palestinian politics, Benedict Anderson's notion of community "always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" may seem a little sanguine.[27] Nevertheless, the notion of a shared Palestinian refugee identity is deeply embedded in that society, wherever it may be physically located.

To appreciate the political significance of that fact, as well as the social implications of the Arab refugee problem, it is necessary for Westerners to grasp the fundamentals of a society that is essentially different from their own. The sense of imagined community exists despite apparent near-equivalence in terms of living standards of refugees not living in camps and nonrefugee communities in major urban centers in the West Bank.[28] Its members also appear little affected by the extent to which space is shared in functional terms between refugees and nonrefugees in any particular geographic location.[29]

Those refugees who remain in camps inside Palestine tend to be the urban poor, and in recent years conditions in the camps have increasingly come to resemble those in "normal" urban slums.[30] However, the essential irrelevance of economic conditions among refugees to their sense of refugee identity—and to the negative perceptions of the refugees among other Arabs—was identified well by Fred Bruhns in 1955. He pointed out that the uprooting of the primary group and their dispersal as refugees was deeply damaging in Arab society, whose most prominent characteristic was a lack of stability and cohesiveness in social relations at all levels beyond that of the primary group, comprising home, family, clan, and community. He observed that refugees, as a group, felt uprooted to a much greater extent socially than economically.[31]

Like Bruhns, Yezid Sayigh makes the point that by making them landless, the uprooting of Palestinian refugees in 1948 deprived the refugees of their social status, both in their own eyes and in those of neighboring populations (including nonrefugee Palestinians). It exposed them to ridicule. The fact that their new neighbors in rural areas often belonged to other sects or social groups—Shiite Muslims and Maronites in Lebanon, 'Alawi Muslims and Druze in Syria, and Bedouins in Transjordan—deepened the isolation of the predominantly Sunni Muslim *fellahin* in the camps.

Palestinian city-dwellers tended to shun their peasant compatriots, both in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and in the Arab host countries. Refugees of urban origin who were compelled by destitution to live in the camps or were forcibly transferred there by the authorities set up separate quarters

and avoided the other inhabitants, while often rebuilding social, commercial, and employment ties with compatriots from their towns and cities of origin. According to Sayigh, ghettoization reinforced the tendency of Palestinian peasants (like peasants in other societies) to conduct as much of their lives as possible within their villages, now replaced by camps, in which UNRWA, rather than national governments, provided virtually all basic services and an appreciable number of jobs. "The refugees . . . knew they were spurned and would continue to be spurned. . . . Being part of a broader Arab (and Islamic) culture was one thing, but losing their place of origin and resettling amidst their Arab brethren evoked deep social (even more than economic) insecurity and cemented opposition to permanent resettlement."[32]

The inferior social status of refugee camp-dwellers, in the eyes of both non-Palestinian Arabs and Palestinians alike, has probably reinforced the boundaries between refugee and nonrefugee populations more generally. As will be discussed later, for the first thirty years of their exile, most refugees continued to marry within their clans, maintaining family blood ties as well as geographic origins.[33] The social distinctions and, at times, discrimination between refugee and nonrefugee, and within the refugee community, between in particular *fellah* (peasant) and *madiun* (town-dwelling) families also remained strong.[34]

In Palestinian society the social status attributed to individuals and families cannot be divorced from their refugee heritage. Amira Hass relates a number of examples of such social discrimination between refugees and nonrefugees in Gaza. The following is particularly evocative:

> Abu Majed's home is in Gaza City's Nasser neighbourhood, where refugees and *muwataneen* (non-refugees) live side by side. Four years ago, his daughter reached school age and was about to start at the UNRWA school for refugees. "We'll be able to walk together," she told a friend happily. The friend, the daughter of *muwataneen,* replied haughtily, "No, we won't. You're a *muhajera,* a refugee. You have to go to school in the camp." "That was the first time she'd heard the word," Abu Majed said, "and she came to ask me what it meant. She thought the girl was cursing at her. I told her that it's an honour to be called a refugee. . . . Sometimes we feel like the Gypsies in Europe, like people without respect. If one of us wants to marry a Gazan girl, the first thing they say is that he's a refugee. That hurts."[35]

Randa Farah, studying Palestinian refugees in Jordan, has similarly found that while, in the views of refugees, the camp (*al mukhayyam*) had become a national symbol of the Palestinian struggle and should be a source of pride, in the eyes of others, including Palestinians who did not live in them, it was the "poorer face of society."[36]

Local frictions that add to feelings of social difference also arise from time to time between refugee camp dwellers and neighboring nonrefugee

Palestinian towns and villages. There is ongoing tension, for example, between the municipal authorities in Nablus and the refugees in Balata camp over the provision of urban services. In Hebron, a city of 150,000 people with a refugee population of around 15,000, refugees appear socially, rather than spatially, isolated from the resident Hebronite community, which has a reputation among Palestinians for exclusivity. And, during the late 1990s, Jalazone camp near Ramallah caused a neighboring village to experience ongoing environmental difficulties as a result of camp residents attaching sewage lines to waste water drainage facilities. There was, not surprisingly, a perception among those who were on the receiving end of the sewage that the refugees were a group apart—or worse.

It is also important not to neglect the impact, on the prospects for successful integration, of pre-1948 socioeconomic differences among the Palestinians themselves. Most of the urban refugees in 1948, almost all of them Christians, and the members of the propertied classes from the villages, never entered the refugee camps. They preferred instead to live in rented properties in Gaza, Nablus, Beirut, or Damascus.[37] In contrast, those who went into the camps and survived in their harsh and degrading conditions for several generations came from more impoverished and less educated backgrounds. Rosemary Sayigh speculates that they were more likely to have fought assimilation and to have been influenced by pan-Arab nationalism or Islamic radicalism than middle-class Palestinians who, she contends, "thought of themselves primarily as Arabs."[38]

Yezid Sayigh argues that the emergence of the contemporary imagined community among Palestinians was linked directly to the mythology of armed struggle. [39] While not excluding that possibility, FAFO studies suggest, however, that among Palestinian refugees the imagined community is sustained by an orientation toward maintaining the symbolism of refugee status (of which living within camps and the continued holding of an UNRWA registration card rate very highly) and toward sustaining kinship ties.

Whatever the balance of reasons behind the imagined community phenomenon may be, the preservation of links with kin and members of the same village of origin remain strong in camps and refugee neighborhoods.[40] Camps have tended to evolve as self-contained, segregated communities that continue to reflect in broad terms the social structure of pre-1948 Palestine in distinguishable neighborhoods, even though migration from camps is observable, particularly on the fringes of urban areas, and space in some camps is occupied by low-income nonrefugees.[41]

A high and stable rate of endogamous marriages (that is, marriage between members of the same clan, and in particular marriage between the children of two brothers) has contributed to the reproduction of Palestinian communities, be they villages, camps, or urban neighborhoods, as distinct units.[42] According to statistics from the Palestinian Ministry of Planning

and International Cooperation, the percentage of marriages between refugees and old Gazan families has been very small. In 1995 there were 8,788 marriages in Gaza, of which 45.8 percent represented *muwataneen* couples and 45 percent refugee couples. Only 9.2 percent were marriages between refugees and *muwataneen.*[43] Statistics from the West Bank from the mid-1990s showed a rate of marriage within the *hamula,* or clan, of about 40 percent, with no compelling evidence of recent decline. Studies of female returnees to camps from the Persian Gulf states indicated that couples tended to marry partners from the same pre-1948 Palestine locality of their parents, even though very few had been to those places.[44]

A further factor preserving the principal characteristics of refugee society is the role of the traditional extended family and the *hamula.* Though the nuclear family may become gradually more prevalent than at present, the key decisionmaking units in regard to matters such as marriage, inheritance, social security arrangements, and land distribution are still extended households and the *hamula.* The *hamula* is also an important corporate group in local politics in relation to other *hamulas,* and is integrated into local politics through the *baladiyya,* or village council, where members of the different *hamulas* come together.[45]

The predominant influence of the traditional extended family is common among Arab societies, but it is strongly characteristic of Palestinian refugee communities. Glenn Robinson points out that the *hamulas* of wealthy and socially prominent West Bank families enjoyed an alliance from 1976 onward with Fatah. The *hamulas* provided a base for political recruitment in the West Bank, even while operating in some cases in a changed political environment characterized by a more egalitarian ideology.[46]

Intense divisions were evident before the intifada according to kinship and descent—that is, according to *hamula* affiliation—and during the intifada along factional lines.[47] During the intifada, according to Robinson, the most successful neighborhood committees in the town of Bayt Sahur were found in areas where the *hamula* structure among traditional residents was still intact. The structure was capable of generating instinctive trust among its familial members, even though the leaderships of the *hamulas* changed to accommodate the nontraditional values of the educated to some extent.[48]

Until the elections to the Palestinian National Congress in January 1996, no formal or elected representation had existed at any level in the Palestinian Authority.[49] However, in addition to traditional family and interclan rivalries, the struggle against Israeli occupation saw the growth in Gaza—and among Palestinian inmates in Israeli prisons—of three major organizational groupings (referred to by Amira Hass as the three super-*hamulas*) of Fatah, the Islamic stream led by Hamas, and the secular leftists represented by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and vestiges of the Palestine Communist Party. These bodies provided a secondary

basis of allegiances, identities, and attachments that helped to produce channels of authority and negotiation in much the same way as tribal loyalties.[50]

The postintifada period saw an intensification of internal fighting between factions, followed by the reestablishment of what was in effect the old *hamula* leadership but now, according to FAFO, "wearing new factional dress."[51] There was also a significant increase in interclan violence in Gaza during 1998, attributed to growing alienation from the authority of the Palestinian Authority and severe economic distress.[52]

The control of conflict was achieved largely through kinship institutions and organizations, rather than the evolution of national institutions for community development and political participation. The strength of *hamula* affiliations during the 1990s as Gazans turned increasingly to the clan for security, identity, and sense of belonging was consistent with observations elsewhere concerning the use of such traditional factors to create new patterns of submission and dependency.[53] When violence threatened and people were forced to become more dependent on each other for subsistence and protection, Palestinian society organized itself ever more closely around prenational structures, including kinship ties.

Yezid Sayigh has argued that a combination of authoritarian and pluralist traits in political management, with a dysfunctional and underinstitutionalized system of government administration, encouraged such a return to traditional clan-based or patriarchal modes of political organization and justice.[54] And according to Palestinian human rights activist Eyad El Sarraj, this behavior was reinforced by the reliance of the Palestinian Authority on clan politics to rule: "In order to get a government job, one has to be from a big clan or belong to Fatah. . . . Moreover, in an environment where security forces function above the law, . . . individuals have little choice but to rely on their families for protection."[55]

The Illusion of Assimilation

The basic structure and orientation of Palestinian society is acknowledged by Palestinians to be fundamentally no different from those Arab societies surrounding it. [56] Given that they share language, religion, social customs, and occasionally family ties, Palestinians have tended to stress their commonalities with neighboring Arab societies.[57] Religion, dialect, food, and patterns of urban and village life are intrinsically important to the Palestinian sense of identity. Variations among such factors sometimes matter a great deal to those who trace their family origins to particular localities. But Syria and Jordan are no less differentiated and complex in their internal social and cultural forms and localized political arrangements than Palestinian society.

The foregoing discussion suggests, however, that those broad similarities in cultural background and practices between refugee communities and host societies are not by themselves sufficient to ensure successful adaptation and assimilation of refugees into the nonrefugee communities surrounding them. In other words, the existence of refugee camps, and the services provided by UNRWA, are indeed barriers to the assimilation of refugees into host countries and other parts of Palestinian society. However, there are more significant socioeconomic obstacles that would also need to be addressed, if bringing the refugee problem to a conclusion through their assimilation into host communities were to be considered a desirable objective of the peace process. Nor should assumptions be lightly made about the durability of refugee mythologies or about the political attitudes of refugees merely because refugees have proved receptive in some cases to various forms of government support such as the provision of public infrastructure, or indeed any form of assistance they might receive from external parties.[58] Even in situations where the refugee population lives in areas of close historical contact such as the cultivated zones of Jordan, ongoing feelings of separateness on the refugees' side and stigmatization on the part of some resident communities have shaped and will probably continue to shape the situation refugees face. The social background of the refugees and specific local circumstances will largely determine whether assimilation is an inevitable or even a likely outcome of the removal of camps or the dissolution of UNRWA.

In addition to such social and cultural factors promoting distinctive identity, refugees have their own political interests and demands. And the size of the refugee population in Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza virtually ensures that the specific political agendas of the refugee community will have ongoing weight in those places. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the present number of refugees in the West Bank and Gaza amount to 1.4 million of the local Palestinian population of 3.1 million. Repatriation to a Palestinian state of a further 500,000–800,000 additional refugees from Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, should that ever eventuate, would raise the refugee proportion of the population of Gaza and the West Bank to 55 percent.[59] The potential political consequences of such refugee demographics cannot be ignored.

Refugees in Host Countries

As will be discussed in more detail below, the circumstances facing Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are very different from those faced by refugees in Lebanon, where for various historical and political reasons Palestinians face a range of discriminatory practices. The situations with

which the Palestinians deal in Syria and Jordan, or in the Persian Gulf Arab states, are also quite distinctive. By historical accident and despite a variety of other pressures they experience in regard to residency rights, most Palestinians in East Jerusalem, including some Palestinian refugees, have access to a range of Israeli identity cards, health services, and better employment opportunities than many other Palestinians.

Adaptation strategies employed by refugees in host countries vary according to local conditions of incorporation and segregation, including the legal regulation of their presence. In the 2000–2001 school year there were about 475,000 refugee pupils accommodated in UNRWA schools. However there were also just over 190,000 refugee pupils enrolled in government and private schools at the elementary and preparatory levels, as well as almost 40,000 nonrefugee pupils attending UNRWA schools by special arrangements with host governments.[60]

UNRWA education programs in the various host countries have followed host country curricula wherever possible, so as to maximize the employment prospects of Palestinian students in those countries. Although UNRWA formally prohibits the use of inciting material in its classrooms, its need to follow the same education curricula and textbooks as host countries has also meant, of course, that refugee children receive the same political line in education materials as their host country counterparts. UNRWA also has no mandate to interfere in political activity among the student body, including in its vocational and teacher training colleges, nor could it exercise effective control over such activities without the support of host governments.[61]

Palestinians living in camps mostly fall within the lower socioeconomic groupings of their host countries.[62] They appear to be more involved in irregular work, day labor, and employment in the informal or illegal sector than is the case with Palestinians living outside camps.[63] Skilled and educated Palestinian refugees have found it easier (where host government policies permit) to attain citizenship and geographic mobility than other, less qualified refugees.

Arab states, with the exception of Jordan, have consistently opposed resettling the refugees or granting them citizenship, arguing that to preserve their refugee identity and to maintain their status as refugees would avoid providing Israel with an excuse to evade its responsibilities for their plight.[64] All have insisted that the future of the refugees will remain unresolved until there is a comprehensive peace settlement.

Jordan

In Jordan, which is a special case because of its unique historical position in the West Bank, there has been a stronger effort than in other host countries to make Palestinians within Jordan part of a national fabric. As of 30

June 1999, there were over 1.5 million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA living in Jordan, almost all in or near key urban centers. The Jordanian government acknowledges that 43 percent of its citizens are of Palestinian origin.[65]

Palestinians of West Bank origin had access to Jordanian citizenship until 1988, and may still obtain limited-validity Jordanian passports. Palestinians serve at the highest levels in the Jordanian government and, albeit at lower levels, in the Jordanian armed forces. Nevertheless, a strong sense of distinctive identity applies between the East Bank Jordanian and Palestinian-origin parts of the population respectively. It is also true that integrative factors for the Jordanian population, as a whole—such as common education curricula, military service requirements, and national public institutions including the elected parliament, the civil service, and the judiciary—have not yet had much opportunity to show whether they are capable of fostering national unity.[66]

The sense of differentiation between Jordanians of East Bank and Palestinian origin appears more marked than the distinctions that are made between other elements and layers of Jordanian society. Among the Jordanian security services and the Bedouin who provide the bedrock of the Hashemite leadership's popular support, suspicion of low-status Palestinians is endemic.

Middle-class Palestinians tend to be seen by Bedouin as exploitative and unduly advantaged (considering that they are deemed, by the Bedouin at least, to have guest status in the kingdom) by their perceived preferential access to business and education opportunities. Urban East Bank Jordanians possessing fairly similar economic conditions to their Palestinian counterparts nevertheless display very limited social and economic interaction or empathy with them. The sense of separation between the two communities is palpable.[67]

Palestinians in Jordan are not a homogeneous group and socioeconomic conditions appear to influence the degree to which people identify themselves as Palestinians and/or Jordanians.[68] Randa Farah has observed that among Palestinians in Jordan, a Jordanian "other" is not necessarily a hostile opposition, depending on the context. However, when memories of the clashes with the Jordanian army of the 1970s are recalled, during which camp-dwelling refugees were prominent participants in the resistance and mobilized by the symbolism associated with it, the "other" is homogenized and represented as antagonistic to a similarly homogenized Palestinian community.[69]

Lebanon and Syria

Lebanon is certainly the most restrictive of the host governments in its approach to such day-to-day issues for refugees as employment, health and education services, and housing.[70] Although 60,000 mostly Sunni refugees

were granted Lebanese citizenship in 1994, many Lebanese fear upsetting confessional balances between Lebanon's religious groups. This has meant that the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon remain stateless foreigners who have no rights of property ownership, investment, or employment except through a complex and lengthy permit process. In practice, Palestinian refugees seeking paid employment are usually obliged to ignore the law, leaving them vulnerable and unprotected by labor and social security regulations.[71]

Lebanese labor law does not discriminate against Palestinian refugees as such, but rather between Lebanese citizens and noncitizens. By being treated as non-Lebanese Arab nationals, refugees are effectively denied access to the practice of most professions in Lebanon by the professional associations or guilds concerned. They find it extremely difficult to gain access to government secondary schools, and therefore to universities. They are excluded from public institutions for higher education.

According to one unpublished study, 20 percent of the adult male refugee population in Lebanon is illiterate, 40 percent of students drop out of school at eleven years of age, and unemployment among refugees is about 65 percent.[72] Restrictions on building and construction in refugee camps mean that according to UNRWA figures in June 2000 there were over 210,000 refugees living in camps that were intended to accommodate only 50,000 refugees.[73]

The Lebanese government is outspoken in its rejection of the notion of permanent settlement of Palestinian refugees in its territory *(tawteen),* let alone the granting of Lebanese citizenship to them. Interviewed in February 1998, Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri argued that improvement in the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon—which he acknowledged were "extremely bad"—would

> lead to resettling the Palestinian refugees and their eventual assimilation. The Palestinians themselves have consistently rejected this approach so that their cause and characteristic identity might not be lost. So, basically, the Lebanese state responded positively to the Palestinians in this respect. The Palestinian refugees currently constitute a problem for Israel as they do for the Palestinians in Lebanon. Lebanon will not help Israel solve this problem. Naturally Israel would be delighted if Lebanon assimilated them under humanitarian slogans.[74]

In December 1998, Prime Minister Hariri was even more specific about the Lebanese stance. He said: "Lebanon will never, ever integrate Palestinians. They will not receive civic or economic rights, or even work permits. Integration would take the Palestinians off the shoulders of the international agency which has supported them since 1948." [75]

In a more graphic description of Maronite Lebanese attitudes to the presence of Palestinians in Lebanon, Jonathan Randal recalls asking the late

Lebanese president Bashir Gemayel where he thought Lebanon's Palestinians could go. In reply, Randal records: "Pounding the table in his office like a petulant child, [Gemayel] roared, 'It's not my problem, not my problem, not my problem.'"[76]

As in Jordan, beyond the formal issues involved, there is a wealth of animosity and mutual distrust between Lebanese and Palestinians that is reflected in dealings at lower levels of officialdom. The abuses of the privileges granted to the Palestinians in Lebanon after 1969, Palestinian exploitation of internal tensions of Lebanese society for their own protection but also for their own ends, and the eventual consequences of such behavior have all strongly affected mutual perceptions at the popular level.

The unilateral abrogation by Lebanon in 1990 of the 1969 Cairo Agreement, which formalized its dealings with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), has placed both the PLO and Lebanon in an awkward position. Even if there were a desire on the part of the Lebanese government to reach an agreement with the Palestinian Authority or the PLO that would alter the status of the refugees and allow them access to employment, the issue would be highly controversial among the Palestinians themselves.

From the Palestinian perspective, any change in the present situation would be linked to perceptions of the likely outcome of the refugee issue in the peace process. If it succeeded in establishing rights to employment for Palestinians in Lebanon, the PLO would be accused of accepting that the long-term outcome of the refugee issue would be integration in host countries. Palestinians in Lebanon, being almost entirely from the 1948 exodus and already feeling abandoned by the Palestinian Authority and the Oslo process, would be even more bitterly divided and antagonistic toward the PLO leadership if they believed their right of return to Israel was being compromised by such a change.[77]

In Syria, Palestinians have had almost equivalent rights with Syrians since 1956, with the main exceptions being the right to hold elected political office and certain restrictions on property ownership. As with other minority groups, however, the Palestinian refugee population is carefully monitored for signs of dissident behavior. The Syrian authorities take an active interest in how UNRWA resources are allocated.[78]

The Tenacity of Refugee Mythologies

Refugee political mythologies do not exist in a political vacuum. Indeed, they are factors that shape and condition the Palestinian political terrain. They are drawn upon and perpetuated by political actors to a considerable degree.

There were no comprehensive studies of Palestinian camp life written until the mid-1980s and few case studies had been undertaken.[79] That situation was remedied to some extent in the latter half of the 1990s by FAFO (Norwegian) and CERMOC (French) academic research projects,[80] and a European Union (EU) study, known as the Bristol Report,[81] which was conducted in the context of the Refugee Working Group (RWG) of the multilateral track of the Madrid peace process. Those studies, involving extensive, sometimes politically sensitive investigation of the economic, cultural, social, and political adaptation of the refugees, encountered misgivings on the part of UNRWA and the host governments where research indicated apparent inconsistencies between official statistics, the statistics put forward by the PLO, and empirical investigations.[82]

The Bristol Report, which focused on questions of humanitarian aid to the refugees, was criticized on the Palestinian side for centering on ways to assist refugees rather than on confronting the underlying political issues of displacement and statelessness. The criticism came at a time when the RWG established under the Madrid process was itself under attack for appearing to place the future of the Palestinian refugees at the mercy of the balance of power and confining refugee rights to what Israel was willing to concede.[83]

The Bristol Report was especially criticized for arguing—though it claimed that this was without prejudice to refugees' right to return to their homes or to receive compensation—that assistance should transcend the legal status of refugees and concentrate on socioeconomic development and rehabilitation of the whole area. The key sensitivity of that approach lay in its recognition of the virtual impossibility of servicing refugee camps or refugee areas without linking those systems to existing or planned infrastructure development for neighboring "nonrefugee" areas, and the efficiencies of integrating other forms of aid for refugees (such as health services and schools) with similar services for nonrefugee residents.

There was concern that such an approach could prejudice the future status of refugees, since refugees with improved social and economic status were likely to move out of camps, to migrate to other countries, and in general to relegate their refugee condition to an abstract political commitment.[84] The report aroused further sensitivity by suggesting that status-centered assistance—that is, assistance provided on the basis that the individual was so entitled merely by virtue of being within the definition of a refugee and being registered as such with UNRWA—should be replaced by needs-centered aid, governed by the notion of vulnerability.

The political implications of the Bristol Report in terms of the future direction of the peace process and the priority to be accorded to the refugee issue and refugee aspirations within that process could not be accepted or

ignored.[85] It was argued that without attention to issues such as enhancing procedures for family reunification, expediting applications of those who lost their residencies in the occupied territories, and implementing the Oslo agreement for relocation of displaced persons to the autonomous regions, improvements in the living conditions of refugees in host countries on the basis presented in the Bristol Report would become "a formula for camouflaging schemes of refugee relocation and resettlement without satisfying their basic needs or aspirations [and] marginalizing and possibly excluding the political issues relevant to the future of the Palestinian refugees."[86]

The strength of the Palestinian rejection, on those political grounds, was sufficient at the time to cause the donor community to back away from direct pursuit of the underlying issue, from a donor perspective, of the appropriateness of the status-based approach.

The tenacity of refugee political activity was also apparent in the dynamics of politics between the refugee-camp populations and the Palestinian Authority during the 1990s. Refugee politics provided a range of opportunities for political activists among the refugee population, including activists among the Union of Youth Activities Centres (UYAC) in the West Bank, to draw on refugee mythologies for political purposes. Poised on local issues between the Palestinian Authority leadership on the one hand and the Palestinian grassroots on the other, and drawing upon kinship ties, camp identity, and their records as activists during the nationalist struggle, the refugee activist stratum proved adept at maintaining pressure upon the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA in support (real or alleged) of refugee rights and interests.[87]

Occasionally, prominent figures associated with the Palestinian Authority leadership but critical of it in their political approach sought political support within the refugee camps by criticizing the PLO's handling of the refugee issue. The main objective of such activity was to capitalize on the evident strength of rejectionist sentiment within Fatah and among the refugee-camp committees. Palestinian negotiators were particularly criticized for appearing to accept postponement of discussion of the political aspect of the refugee problem and its treatment as a humanitarian issue.[88]

One illustration of the capacity of the refugees to fend off political encroachment by the Palestinian Authority upon their presumed rights and status as refugees was the UYAC agreement with the Palestinian Authority in May 1997 that refugees in the West Bank would not participate in the municipal elections called by the Palestinian Authority within the framework of the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles. Refugee groups argued that to participate in such elections would have jeopardized their special refugee status in the Palestinian Authority areas. Insisting on upholding what it described as a nonpartisan and independent social force, the UYAC eventually secured the acceptance of the Palestinian Authority that refugees would conduct independent elections of camp councils parallel to the Palestinian

Authority municipal elections.[89] In 1998 the outgoing head of the UYAC, Jamal Shati al-Hindi, described the UYAC's role as the continuation of the struggle for Palestinian independence and sovereignty, the right of return, and Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital.[90]

Conclusion

Two key elements need to be emphasized from this general overview of the Palestinian refugee situation in which mythologies operate. The first is that in the late 1990s the continuing potency of refugee identity as an imagined community was virtually guaranteed by the combined effects of the ongoing characteristics of refugee society, including family structures and marriage patterns; social discrimination between Palestinian refugees and nonrefugees; and the attitudes of host governments toward their resident Palestinian refugee populations. Refugee identity had deep roots in the nature of refugee society, with its orientation toward maintaining the cohesion of *hamulas* through marriage ties, its sense of separation from nonrefugees, and in some cases the deliberate discrimination of those societies against refugees for socioeconomic, political, and other reasons.

The sense of being a refugee was an irreducible core element of identity among the refugee population, irrespective of where they were located. It was sustained through pressures of collective memory of historical injustice and the hope of redress, or at least a determination not to relinquish that hope, in the face of external pressures.

The memories and mythologies of the imagined refugee community appeared likely to be perpetuated so long as social and political circumstances remained unchanged. Where refugees had moved away from camps and such factors as identification with villages of origin no longer had quite the same influence over identity, the shared fact of exile remained a collective reference point separating refugees from others.

The second issue to be noted was the preparedness of the refugees to mobilize in defense of their interests, including their ongoing insistence upon acknowledgment of their right of return to what is now Israel. Refugee society in the 1990s was experiencing generational changes. Its aspirations and expectations could not be immunized completely against other developments, either in Palestinian society or in the peace process. Despite this, refugee society, especially in its lowest socioeconomic levels and therefore, particularly, in its camp-dwelling population, had a number of characteristics that promoted conservatism ahead of change. It encouraged both the recollection of injustice and the demand that it be redressed. There was strong resistance to compromises that could only come at the expense of those concerns.

Determination that the refugee identity should be preserved, and reinforced wherever possible, led in some cases to questioning on political grounds of the circumstances surrounding the provision of external economic assistance. Political orthodoxy also insisted upon maintaining the principle of uniformity of entitlement across the refugee community, even though this may have meant that distortion of resource allocation was occurring for the sake of maintaining a political principle.

There was also little reason for refugees to see other Palestinian institutions, including the Palestinian Authority, as potential partners except where there was a reasonable prospect of furthering refugee interests by obtaining resources from them or through them. There was instead a disposition among some refugee bodies to see such institutions as competitors—or at best, as unreliable allies—in terms of the pursuit of their political aspirations as refugees.[91]

Collectively, the public expression of refugee political attitudes was almost invariably rejectionist in tone and content. That applied even where force of circumstances, such as the absence of any real choice, convenience, quality considerations, or material benefit may have led individual refugees to take pragmatic approaches to such matters as their choice of service provider in the areas of education and health.

Some degree of acquiescence to political compromises between Israel and the Palestinian Authority was to be expected in practice among the refugee population. But the social and political dynamics of Palestinian refugee society, its interaction with other Palestinians and host countries, and of course its historical and daily interaction with Israel and Israelis all served to reinforce its core mythologies and its fundamentally irredentist orientation on core political issues.

Notes

Chapter-opening epigraphs are from the following sources: David Shipler, *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), p. 55; and David Grossman, *The Yellow Wind,* translated by Haim Watzman (Toronto: Collins, 1988), pp. 7–8.

1. United Nations, *Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 2000–30 June 2001,* UN General Assembly Official Records (GAOR), 56th sess., supp. 13 (A/56/13), p. 54.

2. Salman H. Abu-Sitta, *Palestinian Refugees and the Permanent Status Negotiations,* Policy Brief no. 7, Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, Washington, DC, 16 November 1999.

3. Donna Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens: Palestinians and the End of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1996), pp. 6, 17. Certain categories of Palestinian refugees fall outside UNRWA's definition of its

responsibility. These include Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war who ended up in areas outside UNRWA's area of operations, such as North Africa and the Gulf; internally displaced Palestinians who remained in Israel; Palestinians who were outside Mandate Palestine for more than two years before the 1948 war broke out; residents from Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) who were displaced for the first time in the 1967 war; and those who did not wish to register as refugees (many of whom chose to activate their refugee status in the 1990s following their departure from the Gulf after the Gulf War). Close to 20 percent of the Palestinian population in Israel proper (i.e., 120,000–150,000 people) are internal refugees who were displaced from their homes in 1948 and are not allowed to return. See Elia Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996), pp. 9–10, 19.

4. Manuel Hassassian, "The Political Refugee Problem in the Light of the Peace Process," in Joseph Ginat and Edward J. Perkins, eds., *The Palestinian Refugees: Old Problems—New Solutions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), p. 58. For further discussion of the legal status of the refugees, see A. (Lex) Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (London: Clarendon Press, 1997).

5. Jill Tansley, *Adaptation in the West Bank and Gaza: A Discussion Paper* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, February 1996), pp. 5–6, citing Kevin F. McCarthy, *The Palestinian Refugee Issue: One Perspective* (Santa Monica: Greater Middle East Studies Centre, RAND, 1996); Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process,* p. 13. Zureik cites a study by Kevin Kinsella, *Palestinian Population Projections for Sixteen Countries of the World, 1990 to 2010* (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census Center for International Research), mimeographed, p. 57, which calculates that the number of Palestinians in the Middle East and North Africa will reach about 9.4 million by 2010. By the same year, the population in the West Bank and Gaza, not counting any returnees, will increase by 1 million. This means that the West Bank and Gaza, with a refugee and nonrefugee population of about 2.3 million in 1995, must accommodate a 50 percent increase in population over a period of fifteen years, even without considering the impact of returnees.

6. United Nations, *Report of the Special Representative's Mission to the Occupied Territories, 15 September 1967,* United Nations Report no. A/6797. Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens,* pp. 13–14, has an excellent brief discussion of the debate over the numbers of those who became refugees. Arzt puts the number of displaced persons in 1967 at approximately 280,000–325,000, and suggests that perhaps 120,000–170,000 were persons who had also been refugees in 1948 and then fled again in 1967. The issue of displaced persons, which is largely outside the scope of this book, is dealt with under Article XII of the September 1993 Declaration of Principles, through the establishment of a four-party committee consisting of representatives of Jordan, Egypt, Israel, and the Palestinians. See Salim Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations: From Madrid to Oslo II* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996), pp. 21–26. In the early 1990s, after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the war that followed, over 300,000 Palestinians were forced to leave Kuwait. Most went to Jordan.

7. McCarthy, *The Palestinian Refugee Issue,* p. 11.

8. Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process,* pp. 23–24.

9. *Palestine Report,* 25 April 1997, p. 10.

10. BADIL Resource Centre, *Camp David II, UN Resolution 194, and a Durable Solution for Palestinian Refugees,* 21 July 2000, *FOFOGNET Digest,* 20–21 July 2000.

11. Deborah Sontag, "Quest for Mideast Peace: How and Why It Failed," *New York Times,* 26 July 2001.

12. Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998), p. 4.

13. Signe Gilen, Are Hovdenak, Rania Maktabi, Jon Pedersen, and Dag Tuastad, *Finding Ways: Palestinian Coping Strategies in Changing Environments,* FAFO Report no. 177, Oslo, 1994; Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process,* p. 55.

14. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* p. 68.

15. UNRWA, *Consolidated Registration Instructions* (effective January 1993), chap. 2.1.3, cited in Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 368–369.

16. Ibid., chap. 3.1.5, cited in Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* p. 368.

17. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 49–54.

18. Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process,* pp. 10–11. Among the Palestinian Bedouin forcibly moved within Israel and the West Bank are the Jahileen tribe, who have been subjected to ongoing pressure and ill treatment by the Israeli authorities.

19. Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations,* p. 40.

20. Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens,* p. 49.

21. Salman Abu-Sitta, "The Right of Return: Sacred, Legal, and Possible," in Naseer Aruri, ed., *Palestinian Refugees: The Right of Return* (London: Pluto, 2001), p. 195.

22. Shipler, *Arab and Jew,* p. 55. For an account of change in one Palestinian camp in the West Bank, see Muna Hamzeh-Muhaisen, "From Kerosene Lamps to the Internet: Dheisheh's Journey," *Palestine Report,* 25 July 1997.

23. See, for example, Shipler, *Arab and Jew,* pp. 55–56; and Shlomo Gazit, *The Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1995), p. 27.

24. Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process,* p. 125.

25. See, for example, Emanuel Marx, "Palestinian Refugee Camps in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip," *Middle Eastern Studies* 28, no. 2 (April 1992), pp. 13–14.

26. Gilen et al., *Finding Ways,* p. 42.

27. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), p. 7.

28. Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations,* p. 38.

29. For an insightful commentary on notions of territoriality and psychological and spacial separation among Jewish and Arab Israelis in the Galilee, see Izhak Schnell, *Perceptions of Israeli Arabs: Territoriality and Identity* (Avebury, UK: Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, 1994), pp. xi, 123.

30. Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations,* p. 37. See also Marie Arneberg, *Living Conditions Among Palestinian Refugees and Displaced in Jordan,* FAFO Report no. 237, Oslo, 1997; and Jon Pedersen, *West Bank and Gaza Living Conditions: Are Refugees Different? (The Answer Is: Not Very Much)* (Oslo: FAFO, 1998).

31. Fred C. Bruhns, "A Study of Refugee Attitudes," *Middle East Journal* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1955), p. 133.

32. Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1997), p. 47. See also Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens,* pp. 32–33.

33. Danny Rubinstein, *The People of Nowhere: The Palestinian Vision of Home* (New York: Times Books, 1991), p. 31, n. 2, citing evidence from research in 1977.

34. A. Hovdenak, J. Pedersen, Dag H. Tuastad, and E. Zureik, *Constructing Order: Palestinian Adaptations to Refugee Life,* FAFO Report No. 236, Oslo, 1997, p. 118.

35. A. Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza: Days and Nights in a Land Under Seige,* translated by Elana Wesley and Maxine Kaufman-Lacusta (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), pp. 175–176.

36. Randa Farah, "Crossing Boundaries," p. 282.

37. Rubinstein, *The People of Nowhere,* p. 31.

38. Rosemary Sayigh, "The Palestinian Experience: Integration and Non-Integration in the Arab Ghourba," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1979), p. 108, cited in Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens,* p. 32.

39. Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, p. 23.

40. Gilen et al., *Finding Ways,* p. 59.

41. Ibid., 79–82; Hovdenak et al., *Constructing Order,* pp. 88–89.

42. Gilen et al., *Finding Ways,* p. 56.

43. Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza,* pp. 175–177.

44. Gilen et al., *Finding Ways,* p. 43, citing Ibrahim Wade Ata, *The West Bank Palestinian Family* (London: KPI, 1986), p. 62.

45. Gilen et al., *Finding Ways,* p. 46.

46. Glenn E. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 13, 67.

47. Ibid., pp. 73–74.

48. Hovdenak et al., *Constructing Order,* pp. 119–127.

49. Ibid., p. 132.

50. Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza,* pp. 62–65.

51. Hovdenak et al., *Constructing Order,* p. 127.

52. Sara Roy, "De-Development Revisited: Palestinian Economy and Society Since Oslo," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 3 (Spring 1999), p. 77.

53. Michael Humphrey, *Violence, Fragmentation, and Reconciliation in the Sudan,* unpublished ms., 1997.

54. Yezid Sayigh, "Palestine's Prospects," *Survival* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2000–2001), p. 10.

55. Eyad El Sarraj, "Kill Your Neighbours," Gaza City, Gaza Community Mental Health Program, September 1998, p. 3, quoted in Roy, "De-Development Revisited," p. 77.

56. Ahmed S. Khalidi, "The Palestinians' First Excursion into Democracy," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1996), p. 21.

57. See Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* p. xiii.

58. Marie-Louise Weighill, *Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: The Politics of Assistance,* paper presented at the Palestinians in Lebanon Conference organized by the Centre for Lebanese Studies and the Refugees Studies Programme, Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University, 27–30 September 1996, p. 47.

59. Sayigh, "Palestine's Prospects," p. 8.

60. UN GAOR A/56/13, p. 7.

61. Israeli concerns on these issues are discussed in Chapter 5.

62. Hovdenak et al., *Constructing Order,* pp. 82–83.

63. Gilen et al., *Finding Ways,* p. 21.

64. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 132–133.

65. *The Economist,* 7 December 2002, p. 46.

66. Laurie Brand, "Palestinians and Jordanians: A Crisis of Identity," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 4 (Summer 1995), pp. 46–72.

67. For a discussion of Arafat's efforts to promote conflict with Israel in an effort to draw other Arab regimes into a war of liberation for which they were not prepared, and at the expense of the Jordanian population against whom Israeli retaliation was sometimes directed, see Andrew Gowers and Tony Walker, *Behind the Myth: Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Revolution* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1992), esp. pp. 54–55.

68. Brand, "Palestinians and Jordanians," p. 49.

69. Farah, "Crossing Boundaries," pp. 277–282.

70. Simon Haddad, "The Palestinian Predicament in Lebanon: Forbidden to Settle, but No Place to Go—What to Do?" *Middle East Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (September 2000), pp. 29–40. See also Rosemary Sayigh, "Palestinians in Lebanon: Harsh Present, Uncertain Future," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 1 (Autumn 1995), pp. 37–53; and Rosemary Sayigh, "A Right to Return," *Palestine Report,* 8 January 1999.

71. Letter from Nadim Shehadi, Centre for Lebanese Studies, Oxford, to Elham Bayour, 5 April 1999, *FOFOGNET Digest,* 2–5 April 1999.

72. The study, by FAFO, is cited without mentioning a date in the introduction to Ginat and Perkins, *The Palestinian Refugees,* p. 4.

73. Haddad, "The Palestinian Predicament in Lebanon" pp. 30–31; United Nations, *Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 1999–30 June 2000,* UN General Assembly Official Records (GAOR), 56th sess., supp. 13 (A/55/13), p. 50.

74. MBC Television interview, date not recorded, appearing in FBIS translation in *FOFOGNET Digest,* 10 February 1998.

75. *International Herald Tribune,* 21 December 1998.

76. Jonathan C. Randal, *The Tragedy of Lebanon: Christian Warlords, Israeli Adventurers, and American Bunglers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1984), p. 281.

77. Letter from Nadim Shehadi (cited in endnote 71). For discussion of the tensions between Palestinians in Lebanon and the PLO leadership, see Zvi Bar'el, "A Gas Station, Not a Clinic," *International Herald Tribune,* 17 September 1997.

78. Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 82.

79. Edward Said, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Janet L. Abu-Lughod, Muhammad Hallaj, and Elia Zureik, "A Profile of the Palestinian People," in Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens, eds., *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 286.

80. FAFO (Institute for Applied Social Science, Oslo, Norway); CERMOC (Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain, Paris and Amman). For background on the Refugee Working Group of the multilateral track of the peace process, and the multilaterals themselves, see Joel Peters, *Pathways to Peace: The Multilateral Arab-Israeli Peace Talks* (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, 1996); and Joshua Ruebner *Middle East: The Multilateral Peace Talks,* Congressional Research Service (CRS), Report for Congress, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 15 September 1999.

81. *Assistance to Refugees in the Middle East,* report prepared for the European Union by the Office for International Policy Services and the Refugee Studies Programme at Oxford University, July 1994. The report was presented to the Refugee Working Group at the RWG meeting in Antalya, Turkey, in December 1994.

82. Whereas, for example, official Israeli data from the early 1990s placed the infant mortality rate in Gaza and the West Bank at 25 per 1,000, and Palestinian researchers put it at more than 70 per 1,000, a Norwegian-sponsored study put it at 50 per 1,000 live births for infants under one year of age. Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process,* p. 45.

83. Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations,* pp. 35–36. Tamari cites the views of Muhammad Hallaj, former head of the Palestinian RWG team.

84. Salim Tamari, *Critical Assessment of [the Bristol Report] Assistance to Refugees in the Middle East,* September 1994, cited in Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process,* p. 51.

85. Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations,* pp. 40–41.

86. Ibid., pp. 36–37, 42.

87. Some activists take quite improbable opportunities to link financial stringencies and other problems to supposed wider political agendas. In early 2000, for example, following the dismissal of seventeen of the twenty-two garbage collectors employed by UNRWA at Balata camp in the West Bank, the buildup of uncollected garbage caused unrest in the camp, whereupon Palestinian Legislative Council member Hussam Khader seized the opportunity to describe the dismissals as "part of an international conspiracy to bury our right of return." "Palestinian Refugee Camp Drowns in Garbage," *Middle East Newsline,* 8 February 2000, reported in *FOFOGNET Digest,* 9 February 2000.

88. One such example is that of Hani al-Hassan, member of the Central Council of Fatah, who was prominent during 1997–1998 in criticizing the Oslo Accords as a blow to the refugee cause and an abandonment of political principle. Al-Hassan also attacked the Multilateral Working Group on Refugees as being intended to bypass the refugee issue to arrive at the resettlement of refugees in host countries. *Al-Ayyam,* 11 February 1998, reporting on comments made at a seminar organized by the Shaml Centre in Ramallah, 10 February 1998.

89. The basic position taken by the UYAC was that it wished to demonstrate "both to the people and to [Palestinian Authority] officials" that the UYAC was an independent force able to defend refugees' rights and to represent both the social and the political interests of the refugees. Interview with Union of Youth Activities Centres spokesperson Salah Abed Rabbo, *News from Within* 13, no. 7 (July 1997), p. 25.

90. *FOFOGNET Digest,* 20–21 September 1998.

91. Farah, "Crossing Boundaries," pp. 291–293.

4

Refugee Memories and Mythologies

*"What can be said to someone who still holds the keys to his home in Safed, Acre, Jaffa and Haifa?" the interviewer asks Abdallah al-Hourani, Palestinian Authority Minister for Refugee Affairs (*Al-Hayat al-Jadida, *15 July, 1998). "Tell him," replied the minister, "to bequeath them to his sons or grandsons, since the day will come when we, or our sons, or our grandsons, will return. The Crusaders lived in our land for 242 years, until the liberation of their last outpost, and Israel is like a tree that has flowered on land not belonging to it. No matter how much it is fertilized, it cannot put down roots, and when the fertilizer stops, it will die."*

—Quoted in *Ha'aretz*

The siren-call of [Gallipoli] has little to do with facts or common sense or the desiccated footnotes of academics. It is rooted in myth and nostalgia—and imagining.

—Les Carlyon, *Gallipoli*

This chapter examines the core elements of Palestinian refugee collective memories and mythologies, which include the direct experience and retelling of memories of Palestine before the war, of flight, and of dispossession. They also include perceived rights as refugees to redress vis-à-vis Israel, including, most importantly, the right of return, as well as compensation. Among many Palestinian refugees there is also a perception that the international community is morally and legally obliged to support and assist them, by virtue of their historical status, until such time as their rights as Palestinian refugees have been recognized and restored in the context of a peace settlement with Israel.[1] That perception applies especially to the Western powers who accepted and legitimized the entry of Israel into the international community.

Dispossession

A basic starting point for Palestinian national mythology, which is shared between both refugee and nonrefugee Palestinians, is the fact of dispossession

and dispersal and the subsequent search for a sovereign state. That process followed a struggle since the early twentieth century to prevent Jewish immigration on a scale that was considered capable of endangering the economic development, self-determination, and, it was feared, even the existence of the Arab community in Palestine.[2]

Arab rejection of displacement by Jewish land purchases and mass immigration found concrete expression in such actions as the anti-Jewish riots of 1920–1921 and most notably in the massacres of 1929, as popular Arab hatred of Jewish immigrants grew. The failure of efforts up to the mid-1930s to prevent further Jewish immigration provided the basis for the 1936 general strike and the 1936–1939 Arab revolt against the British, as the Mandate power, and against the Zionist movement, which the British were widely seen as favoring.[3]

The UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 181 (II) on 29 November 1947. It recommended the adoption and implementation, with regard to the future government of Palestine upon termination of the British Mandate, of a plan for partition and the creation of Arab and Jewish states not later than 1 October 1948.[4] The Jewish Agency welcomed the resolution at the time it was passed. The Declaration of the State of Israel on 15 May 1948 stated that Israel was prepared to cooperate in its implementation. Admitting Israel to UN membership, the preamble of UN General Assembly Resolution 273 (III) of 11 May 1949 recalled both Resolution 181 (II) and Resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 (discussed in more detail below), taking note of "the declarations and explanations made by the representative of the Government of Israel before the *ad hoc* Political Committee in respect of the implementation of the said resolutions."[5]

At the Lausanne conference in April 1949 and in subsequent international conferences, however, Israel made it clear that it regarded Resolution 181 (II) in effect as a basis for negotiation with the Arab countries and that the refugee issue should be linked to a territorial settlement in a peace treaty. It did not necessarily accept limits to Jewish immigration and Israeli territory, and the status proposed by the United Nations for Jerusalem as a *corpus separatum.*[6]

Resolution 181 (II) was rejected by the Palestinian leadership, who refused to sign away the right to sovereignty over any part of the country. Most Arab states rejected it on the grounds that it violated the provisions of the UN Charter, which granted people the right to decide their own destiny.[7] The partition plan was also deemed at the popular political level to be manifestly unjust to the Arab population in its proposed division of Mandate Palestine between Jewish and Arab states.

Emir Abdullah of Transjordan, seeing an opportunity for territorial expansion and the chance to prevent the emergence of a Palestinian state under the leadership of his rival, the mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, had

pursued an agreement with the Jewish Agency in 1946 on a partition plan that would lead to the creation of a Jewish state and the annexation of the Arab lands of Mandate Palestine to Transjordan. Abdullah echoed in public the resolve of the Arab League to resist by force the UN partition resolution. His undeclared policy preference, however, remained an outcome enabling the two sides to partition postmandatory Palestine between them, annexing the Arab parts to Transjordan and subordinating Palestinian self-determination to Jordanian national interests.[8] Other Arab leaders remained deeply suspicious of Abdullah's intentions.[9]

The violence between Arabs and Jews that followed the passage of Resolution 181 (II) increased in intensity until on 15 May 1948, immediately following the British withdrawal, war broke out between the Arab states and the newly declared state of Israel. By July 1948 it was clear to the Jewish community and to Arab leaderships that Israel had won the war.[10]

By the end of October 1948 Israel had expanded its territory to include 78 percent of Mandate Palestine. Of the 900,000–950,000 Palestinian inhabitants of the areas that were incorporated into the state of Israel, only 150,000 remained.[11] Anecdotal evidence consistently suggests that most refugees probably believed they would only be leaving temporarily,[12] even as developments on the ground changed the demographic and physical shape of Palestine and made the possibility of a return of the refugees increasingly remote.[13] Israel and Jordan together blocked the UN plan embodied in UN Resolution 181 (II) to internationalize Jerusalem.[14]

Measures were taken by the Israeli government to institutionalize the blockage of Palestinian return. These included laws and regulations for the expropriation of "abandoned" Arab property, including the Abandoned Areas Ordinance of 1948, the Emergency Regulations Concerning the Cultivation of Waste Lands Regulations of 1949, and the Absentees' Property Law of 1950. The Law of Return of 1950 and the Nationality Law of 1952 guaranteed all Jews a virtually automatic right to emigrate to Israel and to become Israeli citizens, while denying that right to others, including the Palestinians who fled in 1948. Although Palestinian refugees clung to the notion that they would indeed be able to return, by mid-1949 it had become almost inconceivable.[15]

Struggling to cope with the influx of 720,000 Palestinian refugees, Arab countries were adamant, for obvious political and national interest reasons, that those refugees should be provided with humanitarian assistance until a solution for the refugee problem was reached and implemented based on their right to return to their homes. As mentioned earlier, the Arab states rejected an Israeli offer at the Lausanne conference in July 1949, advanced under strong pressure from the United States, that under certain conditions it would take back 100,000 refugees.[16]

Arab governments also led the opposition within the UN to treatment of the Palestinian refugees on the same basis as refugees in postwar Europe.[17]

The Arab states insisted that the Palestinian refugees should be the subject of special United Nations attention, rather than being included in the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which was created five days earlier than the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).[18] The primary emphasis of UNHCR at the time was on local integration and third-country resettlement. The objection in Arab circles against treating Palestinian refugees in that manner was largely based on their concern that the prospect of returning to their homes would be negatively affected if they were included under the UNHCR mandate.[19]

The approach taken in 1948–1949 was not unlike the stance adopted fifty years later by Western countries in regard to receiving refugees from Kosovo. Like the Arab states at the time of the Palestinian refugee exodus, several Western countries allowed temporary entry on humanitarian grounds, but stressed the temporary nature of the Kosovar refugee presence, believing that permanent removal to other countries would signal to the Serbian government that ethnic cleansing worked.[20] The stance taken publicly in 1948 by the Arab states served domestic political agendas. In some cases, including Jordan and Syria, it also afforded a degree of political cover as efforts proceeded quietly to explore possible forms of accommodation with Israel on matters of more direct national interest.[21] In that vein, Syrian president Husni Za'im sought negotiations with Israeli prime minister David Ben Gurion in order to reach a peace settlement. He proposed that Syria absorb 250,000–300,000 Palestinian refugees (with Western countries covering the cost of resettlement and development projects for them along the Euphrates River) and that Israel agree to a demarcation of their frontier down the middle of the (upper) Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee.

Israeli historians have differing views regarding the significance of the offer. They largely agree that Ben Gurion rejected the overture partly because of dislike and suspicion of Za'im personally, and partly for strategic reasons and because he judged that peace with Syria at that time was not a real or viable option. Mainly, however, Ben Gurion was not willing to pursue a peace process with Syria or Jordan or Egypt that would entail substantial Israeli concessions on territory, refugees, or water, for fear that such a step would be interpreted as evidence of weakness and would accordingly lead to escalating demands for further Israeli concessions.[22]

A later Syrian ruler, Adib Shishakli, also offered in 1952 to sign a nonbelligerency agreement with Israel and absorb half a million Palestinian refugees in the framework of that agreement in addition to the 80,000 then located in Syria. Ben Gurion refused, however, to make any territorial concessions, except on the basis of reciprocity, in return for such an agreement. He insisted on exclusive and unfettered rights for Israel over the waters of Lake Tiberias and the Hula (being drained at the time by Israel) and the Jordan River, an approach that effectively stymied the negotiations.[23]

Benny Morris has argued that Israel preferred the armistice agreements concluded with neighboring Arab countries in 1949 over a full peace that would have required substantial territorial withdrawals and other major concessions. In his words, the Israeli leadership "entered the postwar era desiring peace—but not a peace that involved paying a significant price . . . for something they felt should be theirs by virtue of their victory."[24]

Although the domestic ramifications of the military defeats incurred in 1948 included serious political problems for most Arab regimes, the overall results as embodied in the armistice agreements were far from intolerable for Israel's neighbors. Jordan acquired control over the West Bank. Egypt retained control over the Gaza Strip and thereby avoided an Israeli military presence along its most important southerly access route. Lebanon, while concerned at the prospect of long-term settlement of Palestinians in Lebanese territory, benefited from the rerouting of Iraq's oil pipelines away from Israel. Beirut replaced Haifa as the leading transit port on the eastern Mediterranean.[25]

For Palestinians, however, the description of the events of 1948 as *al-nakbah,* or "the catastrophe," was entirely apt. The events were totally unlike any Arab experience recorded to that point in the conflict with the Zionist movement. Population transfer had been discussed in Zionist circles as the solution to "the Arab problem" and had been observed by some outsiders as early as the 1920s to be part of the Zionist objective,[26] but the notion of mass transfer of the Arab population of Palestine was firmly opposed by the British Mandate power. It remained no more than a hypothetical scenario during the period of British rule.[27] In principle, Ben Gurion favored compulsory transfer of Palestinians to neighboring Arab countries as part of a strategic approach to sovereignty and a reduction of the number of Arabs in the Jewish state. He preferred, however, to avoid formally advocating such a policy when the British had already made it clear they would not support or implement it. He proposed that a future Jewish state would approach Arab states with regard to the voluntary transfer of Arab farmers and the purchase of land for that purpose.[28]

The Palestinian reaction to *al-nakbah* was to attribute collective responsibility for their suffering to the international community, especially the United States and Britain. Those countries, in the Palestinian view, had allowed, even welcomed, the entry of Israel into the international community and yet had failed to prevent or to put right the tragedy that followed the withdrawal of Britain from its responsibilities.[29]

Historical Responsibility

While it is not my intention to review the highly contested question of historical responsibility for the refugee exodus in detail, some brief remarks

on the debate surrounding that issue may be in order. A distinction is also made here between, on the one hand, the circumstances surrounding the departure of most of the Arab leadership (as early as September–October 1947) and 70,000 mostly upper-class Palestinians by the end of January 1948 and, on the other hand, the reasons for the vast majority of Palestinians becoming refugees in the period that followed. Historians agree that the departure of the former category was largely voluntary.[30] The main debate is over the exodus of Palestinians from March 1948 onward, and in particular whether the exodus was the result of Jewish plans to drive the Arabs out of Palestine.

In 1987, Benny Morris's key conclusion, after detailed analysis but still without access to certain data that had not yet been released, was that the events of 1947–1949 were so complex, changing, and varied that a single-cause explanation of the exodus from most sites was untenable.[31] Morris concluded that the refugee problem was born of war, not by design, Jewish or Arab. It was largely a by-product of Arab and Jewish fears and of the protracted and bitter fighting and, to a lesser degree, the deliberate creation of Jewish and Arab military commanders and politicians.[32]

Critics of Morris's work, who are generally sympathetic to the Palestinians, condemned his findings as biased and inconsistent with his own evidence. Norman Finkelstein concluded, for example, that a legitimate interpretation of Morris's evidence, if not his thesis, was that "a sequence of Zionist terror and Israeli expulsion" lay behind the birth of the refugee problem.[33] Edward Said also has described, with the aid of diary entries of a former director of the Jewish National Fund, Joseph Weitz, how a Zionist aim was to Judaize territory "coterminously with de-Arabising it."[34]

In later publications, Morris too has acknowledged that he may have erred in not initially attributing enough weight to the Zionists' "transfer" predisposition in explaining what happened in 1948. He has noted that

> the Zionist leadership in the late 1930s and early 1940s almost consensually and persistently supported the idea of transfer, whether "voluntary" (with Arab agreement and compensation) or compulsory, as a solution to the "Arab problem." . . . Nor was Ben Gurion alone in the Zionist hierarchy in supporting transfer. Indeed the majority of the movement's leaders in the 1930s and 1940s went on record (at least in closed fora) in support of the idea.[35]

However, historians and other academics more inclined to be supportive of Israel, and in particular commentators from the Right wing of Israeli politics, have condemned the interpretation of the historical record by Morris and other revisionist historians as distortion peddled by post-Zionist cynics.[36]

The Israeli official version of the events surrounding the departure of the Palestinians in 1948 has attributed the blame for that situation to the Arab states for rejecting partition and attacking the newly established Jewish

state.[37] The popular Israeli version of the events of 1948, as outlined by David Ben Gurion, was that the Palestinians left "following instructions by the Arab leaders, with the Mufti [of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini] at their head, under the assumption that the invasion of the Arab armies at the expiration of the Mandate [would] destroy the Jewish state and push all the Jews into the sea, dead or alive."[38] Morris and other writers have effectively discredited this claim, pointing out that no evidence has been produced of instructions by the Arab Higher Committee, or any Arab government, to Palestinians to leave the country.[39]

Contemporary scholarly debate centers on the importance of the Israeli military plan known as Plan Dalet, or Plan D, to the eventual refugee outcome. Morris argues that Plan D was a military program for securing the interior of the Jewish state and the clusters of Jewish settlements outside the state's territory against the expected Arab invasion following the expiry of the UN mandate. It was not, in his view, a political blueprint for expulsions, although in practice it meant the depopulation and destruction of unspecified villages "that hosted hostile local militia and irregular forces." Morris acknowledges, however, that

> in providing for the expulsion of communities and/or destruction of villages that had resisted the Haganah, [Plan D] constituted a strategic-ideological anchor and basis for expulsions by front, district, brigade and battalion commanders (who in each case argued military necessity) and it gave commanders, post facto, a formal, persuasive covering note to explain their actions.[40]

In support of his view that Plan D was essentially a military plan, Morris also found no evidence, apart from the existence of Plan D itself, of a political decision in March or April 1948 in favor of "a blanket, national policy of driving out the Arabs." Nor was there any general expectation on the Jewish side that there would be a mass exodus by the Arab population. The evidence of a deliberate pursuit of expulsion policies "with respect to certain key strategic districts and localities" including Tiberias and Haifa emerged from April 1948 onward, amid the accelerating disintegration of the situation on the ground.[41]

In contrast to Morris's interpretation, Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi has argued that Plan D was a master plan of the Jewish High Command for the expulsion and eviction of the Palestinians in order to achieve a secure basis for the Israeli state.[42] On balance, and particularly when combined with the evidence referred to earlier of Zionist attraction to the notion of transfer, Khalidi's assessment cannot be dismissed, at least insofar as the assumptions of Plan D reflected, in Ilan Pappe's words, "an existing notion prevalent among the policy-makers of the Jewish community . . . that a Jewish success in the struggle over Palestine might involve the destruction of the Palestinian community."[43] While noting that Plan D demanded the

surrender of the population, not their expulsion, and that it was not the only factor causing the flight of the refugees, Pappe's own conclusion—and in my view a reasonable one—was that Jewish policy, as exemplified by Plan D, was "the principal reason for the departure of most of the Arabs of Palestine."[44]

The question of responsibility for the Palestinian refugee exodus is likely to remain controversial in academic circles, and a propaganda issue for both sides. The general Arab belief continues to be that the Jews expelled the Palestinian population as a matter of deliberate policy choice.[45] In the words of Salman Abu-Sitta, the Palestinians

> did not leave on Arab orders. They were expelled or removed from their villages by force. . . . 89 per cent left due to direct Israeli military assaults, 10 per cent left due to psychological war and the remaining 1 per cent left on their own initiative. . . . The exodus was . . . concurrent with and resulting from Israeli military operations.[46]

That view is consistent with the observation of John Bagot Glubb (Glubb Pasha), the British commander of the Jordanian army, who wrote from his own experience that

> [t]he story which Jewish publicity at first persuaded the world to accept, that the Arab refugees left voluntarily, is not true. Voluntary emigrants do not leave their homes with only the clothes they stand up in (and) in such a hurry that they lose other members of their family. . . . The fact is that the majority left in panic flight, to escape massacre (at least, so they thought). They were in fact helped on their way by the occasional massacre. Others were encouraged to move by blows or by indecent acts.[47]

The propaganda value of the issue also remains current, for both sides. Benny Morris has observed that

> the general Arab claim, that the Jews expelled Palestine's Arabs, with predetermination and preplanning, as part of a grand political-military design, has served to underline the Arab portrayal of Israel as a vicious, immoral robber state. The Israeli official version, that the Arabs fled voluntarily (not under Jewish compulsion) and/or that they were asked/ordered to do so by their Palestinian and Arab states' leaders, helped leave intact the new state's untarnished image as the haven of a much-persecuted people, a body politic more just, moral and deserving of the West's sympathy and help than the surrounding sea of reactionary, semi-feudal, dictatorial Arab societies.[48]

Responsibility and Mythology

Debate over the historical record, however, is of little importance so far as refugee mythologies are concerned. Devoid in popular imagery of their

historical complexities and moral ambiguities, the events of 1947–1948 have become narratives that can be understood and managed at a personal level of experience and real or imagined memory. Palestinian memories of that period naturally focus upon narratives concerning the nature of village life and the property to which the refugees wished to return. Memories are colored by frustration at the precipitate British withdrawal, the traumatic flight of the refugees, and the collapse by August 1949 of international efforts to secure the return of even a modest number of refugees to their homes.

At the popular level, over the course of five decades the Palestinian collective narrative has simplified, polemicized, shaped, and perhaps distorted a highly complex, possibly historically inevitable, and certainly unmanageable conflict situation. The sense of betrayal over the events of 1948 and their aftermath continues to influence Palestinian political perspectives of their situation and wider Arab perceptions of the contemporary role of the United States in the region.

The drama of the Palestinian narrative and its capacity to be related to direct family experience has caused Palestinian collective memory of the catastrophe to be highly durable, despite the passage of over fifty years and generational changes.[49] The mythology has withstood controversies over the nature of the historical record, the inadequacies of oral histories and individual recollections, and the increasing disintegration of the personal records that could be used to verify at least some of the individual memories of the events. Establishing the facts of what happened has not been made any easier by the absence of access to official Arab records of the events (if such records exist), censorship and argument surrounding Israeli accounts, and concern about the objectivity of various versions of what took place.[50]

Even allowing that the work of scholars to uncover the historical facts has been as thorough and professional as circumstances permit, collective memory has, in effect, made other interpretations, let alone more critical analyses, of the core Palestinian narrative, including the right of return, largely irrelevant, at least among Palestinian audiences. This is also true, of course, of the politically orthodox Israeli interpretation of what transpired in 1948 as shown by the reaction to the *Tekumma* series on Israeli television in 1997 (see Chapter 1).[51]

On the Palestinian side, imagery associated with the events of 1948 has galvanized and sustained political energy among the refugee population for over five decades. Given the social background outlined earlier, with its orientation, at least in terms of camp-dwelling refugees, toward social continuity rather than change, and toward the conscious preservation of an identity as refugees, it is hardly surprising that the collective memory has been preserved. The trauma of those massive flights of ordinary people from their homes, livelihoods, and land; the prevention of their return; and the shock and bewilderment that was part of the tragedy of 1948 are deeply etched into the Palestinian historical narrative.

More than any other single factor (with specific influences arising from or reflecting gender, class, origin, period of exodus, and the age of different individuals), the collective memory of that experience has shaped the identity of the Palestinian refugees as a people. And there has been a conscious effort among Palestinians to sustain that memory, especially among younger generations, in the hope of political and financial redress.[52] Nakba Day, observed every 15 May since 1998, has become a major commemoration of the disaster that afflicted the Palestinians with the establishment of the state of Israel, with speeches at mass rallies in the West Bank and Gaza, and in refugee camps elsewhere in the Arab countries.

Rosemary Sayigh, studying Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, has noted what she refers to as the primordiality of the exodus from Palestine as the starting point of oral life histories of Palestinian women in Shatila camp in Beirut. She found that to be the case, not only among those who were already adult in 1948, but also among many who were too young in 1948 to have personal recollections.

> The degree of detail of that terrible journey preserved in memory over four and a half decades signals not only the significance assigned to it retrospectively—as historic mistake, rupture from Palestine and historical exile, precursor of other tragedies—but also suggests processes of collective memory formation as individual stories were told and retold in refugee gatherings.[53]

Only those refugees born in Lebanon who grew up after the 1969 Cairo Agreement, which gave the Palestinians autonomy in running their own affairs in camps in Lebanon, chose to structure their personal stories around national political events such as the intifada or placed their personal political experiences in the forefront of their life experiences.[54]

Right of Return

The central place in Palestinian political mythology of the right of return, based on Resolution 194 (III), has been widely noted. Don Peretz, for example, observes that since 1948 the right of return acquired such emotional connotations that the term became the basis of Palestinian nationalism, in much the same way that the return to Eretz Israel became the ideological foundation of Zionism.

> The concept of return permeates modern Palestinian literature; it is at the core of history taught to children in refugee camps throughout the region, and is usually the first thought expressed by average Palestinians when

> discussing Middle East problems. To many, the right of return is an important symbol; recognition would remove the stigma of second-class citizenship imposed on Palestinians, a stigma that exists even in Jordan, where by law the refugees have equal rights.[55]

As will be discussed below, refugee perceptions of their rights, including their perception of a right to return to what is now Israel and to receive compensation, are probably less susceptible to change than other Palestinian mythologies concerning sovereignty, Jerusalem, or settlements. Public acknowledgment or articulation of any such change among refugees is even more unlikely.

Resolution 194 (III) and the Right of Return

The right of return is commonly understood among Palestinians to be enshrined in UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III), adopted on 11 December 1948. The resolution established a UN Conciliation Commission, which was directed to establish contacts between Israel and neighboring Arab states and to deal with the general task of bringing about the final settlement of all questions outstanding between them; reaffirmed that Jerusalem should be placed under a permanent international regime; and resolved also that the refugees should be permitted to return to their homes.[56] It was never possible to implement the resolution in full.

From the refugee perspective, the key part of Resolution 194 (III) is Paragraph 11. That much-mentioned but perhaps less well-understood paragraph reads as follows:

> 11. [The General Assembly] *Resolves* that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.

The resolution itself was the outcome of the insistence of UN mediator Counte Folke Bernadotte that the right of the refugees to return to their homes at the earliest practicable date should be affirmed by the UN "notwithstanding the views expressed by the Provisional Government of Israel."[57] The principle of refugee return was mentioned nine times in Bernadotte's first progress report as mediator in May 1948. And on 17 September 1948, the day before his assassination at the hands of Jewish terrorists, he expressed the view that it would be "an offence against the principles of elemental justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were

denied the right to return to their homes while Jewish immigrants flow into Palestine, and, indeed, at least offer the threat of permanent replacement of the Arab refugees who have been rooted in the land for centuries."[58]

The terms of Resolution 194 (III), a UN General Assembly resolution and therefore nonbinding on UN member states, do not refer unambiguously to a *right* of return, as most refugees and many commentators assume and as Count Bernadotte had recommended before his death. Instead, the return of refugees was placed in the context of *permission* being *granted* for that return, of the *practicability* of that return taking place, and moreover, of the willingness of refugees to "live in peace"—with its strong implication that this would involve acceptance of the political and military outcomes of the 1948 conflict.

The overall shape of those outcomes was quite firmly established by the time Resolution 194 (III) was passed in December 1948.[59] They included, as mentioned above, the defeat of the Arab forces and the refugee exodus over the preceding eighteen months and the expulsions and forcible transfers of Palestinian populations by Israeli forces documented by UN mediator Ralph Bunche and other observers, as well as the measures being taken by the Israeli leadership to prevent the wholesale return of refugees.[60]

The Politics of the Right of Return

Developing an estimate of the numbers of Palestinian refugees who might actually be prepared to move to a Palestinian state under various political and financial scenarios is beyond the scope of this book. The key point is that as a political issue, demand among refugees for *acknowledgment* of the right to return is an enduring matter of the highest political importance, irrespective of whether the intention exists to exercise that right.[61]

While there is almost universal belief among Palestinians in the Palestinian right to return, there is an ideological barrier around the discussion of what that would mean in practical terms. Until recently at least, the sensitivity surrounding the issue of return has constrained public discussion among Palestinians about those matters.[62] Salim Tamari noted in 1996 that since the multilateral track of the Madrid peace conference began to address the refugee issue, the Palestinians had taken a "principled, but static" position on the question of return. They insisted that Resolution 194 (III) or, more precisely, their own interpretation of that resolution, had to form the basis for all solutions to the refugee question, despite the systematic rejection by Israel of that position.[63]

Both Lex Takkenberg and Rashid Khalidi point out that there is, moreover, no authoritative Palestinian definition of what constitutes the right of return. That right has been ascribed a range of meanings, from the right

of all Palestinians or their descendants to return to their former homes and places of origin in Palestine, to a return of some of the Palestinians currently in exile to some limited part of Palestine.[64]

It is debatable whether a compelling argument exists for the interpretation of Resolution 194 (III) as providing a basis in international law for *collective* and *national* rights.[65] Donna Arzt believes that in its most widely accepted meaning, international law can be said to provide "only a right to enter a preexisting country on the part of an individual whose country it always was."[66] It is perhaps easier to argue the case for the right of return on the basis that the right of return exists on the basis of customary international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions of 1949, UNHCR advocacy of voluntary repatriation as a solution to refugee problems, and general recognition that a state cannot legally expel a population under its control and that those who are expelled have a right to reverse an illegal act and to return to their homeland.[67]

Advocates of the right of return to Israel insist, nevertheless, that agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) cannot invalidate the right of return encompassed in Resolution 194 (III), since international law and UN resolutions cannot be subordinated by a political agreement whose provisions fail to grant rights equal to or beyond those defined by international law.[68] There are, however, problems in sustaining that view as a practical proposition.

Return to pre-1967 Israel in significant numbers has long been rendered impossible, so long as Israel chooses to preserve its political and demographic identity as a Jewish state from the inflow of non-Jews. And it is possible to argue that in a formal sense, the Arab states have already accepted such an outcome. Forty years after the disaster, the impossibility of implementing Resolution 194 (III) en masse was implicitly recognized by the Palestine National Council (PNC) when it approved the Palestinian Declaration of Independence on 15 November 1988.[69] The decision of the PNC meeting in Algiers to make an unambiguous claim to Palestinian sovereignty on the basis of a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, based on UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (II) concerning partition, and UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, affirming the right of Middle East states to security free from threats of force, carried with it an implication that the PLO could no longer envisage the right of self-determination within the territory of Israel.[70]

Moreover, while saying that the historical injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people followed upon Resolution 181 (II), the PNC declaration characterized Resolution 181 (II) as having called for "two states, one Arab and one Jewish."[71] Implicit in the acceptance of Resolution 181 (II) was therefore an acceptance of the argument that Israel's Jewishness was enshrined in international law.[72]

There is evidence at the leadership level of the Palestinians of similar change in commitment to the issue of return to Israel. Yasser Arafat's address to the UN General Assembly in 1974, which placed the Palestinian issue in the context of imperialism and Zionist aggression and expressed directly the "right to self-determination and our undisputed right to return to our homeland" contrasts sharply with his address to the UN General Assembly in Geneva of 13 December 1988 following the PNC's formal acceptance of UN Security Council Resolution 242. In the 1988 speech, Arafat mentioned return of refugees only tangentially. He referred instead, in the latter speech, to settlement of "the issue of Palestinian refugees in accordance with pertinent United Nations resolutions." He did so, moreover, within an undertaking to seek a comprehensive settlement with Israel on the basis of Resolutions 242 and 338 and respect for the right to exist in peace and security for all.[73]

Israeli Perspectives

The Israeli approach to the refugee issue proceeds from the fundamental premise that the solution to the problem rests with resettlement of the refugees among the Arab states. For obvious reasons, Palestinian demands that all refugees be given the right to return to their former homes in what is now the state of Israel raise existential fears among most Israelis. According to Meron Benvenisti, the 1967 census found that about 10,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem (16 percent of the population at that time) had been born in the western part of the city. Faisal Husseini reminded an Israeli audience in May 1995 that 70 percent of West Jerusalem property belonged to Palestinian refugees.[74]

The human dimension of this particular problem is as sad and as complicated as any aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian saga. I recall being told by a prominent Palestinian in Amman, Jordan, how she had visited spontaneously her original family home in Jaffa after the conclusion of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan and had been received courteously by the Israeli family there. But as conversation proceeded, and the Palestinian woman mentioned various childhood memories associated with the house, the atmosphere became strained. In an emotional scene for all concerned, her Israeli hostess told her visitor that she could only hope to understand the trauma her family had experienced, but that situation was not of her making. She had arrived in Israel after 1948 and had invested most of her life savings in paying for the house. It was now her family home.

In essence, the Israeli government's formal approach has followed the policy toward Arab refugees outlined by David Ben Gurion on 1 August 1948, which stated as follows:

> When the Arab states are ready to conclude a peace treaty with Israel this question [of refugees] will come up for constructive solution as part of a general settlement, and with due regard to our counter-claims in respect of the destruction of Jewish lives and property, the long-term interests of the Jewish and Arab populations, the stability of the State of Israel and the durability of the peace between it and its neighbours, the actual fate and position of the Jewish communities in the Arab countries, the responsibilities of the Arab governments for their war of aggression and their liability for reparation, will all be relevant in the question whether, to what extent, and under what conditions, the former Arab residents of the territory of Israel should be allowed to return.[75]

Until the negotiations in Taba in January 2001, discussed below, the closest that Israel came to accepting Resolution 194 (III), in formal terms at least, was its reluctant agreement at the Lausanne conference, launched in April 1949, to accept a French initiative, backed by the United States, to use a concise synthesis of Resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III) in the form of a joint protocol accepting the principle of repatriation and the internationalization of Jerusalem as a basis for negotiation (*base de travail*). An Israeli bid for membership of the United Nations was due to be considered on 11 May 1949, shortly after the proposal was made to both sides in Lausanne by the French. Though consistent in its rejection of the principle of substantial repatriation of the refugees, despite sustained pressure from the United States, Israel could not afford to jeopardize U.S. support for its forthcoming UN membership bid. The Arab delegates also gave their consent to the document. However, both sides later repudiated their actual commitment to the protocol.[76]

As mentioned earlier, in July of that year, under intense pressure from the United States to accept the repatriation of 200,00 to 300,000 refugees, Israel eventually offered to repatriate 100,000 refugees of the approximately 723,000 total number.[77] The offer was formally conveyed to the Palestine Conciliation Commission on 3 August 1949, and was made conditional on Israel "retaining all present territory" and on freedom to resettle the returnees wherever Israel saw fit.[78] The Israeli offer, regarded by the United States as unsatisfactory, was promptly rejected by the Arab countries at the time as insufficient and propagandist.[79] From that point on, in the words of Benny Morris, the status quo and policies on both sides "hardened and calcified."[80]

From an Israeli perspective, the claim to a right of return was flawed in formal terms by a lack of a clear and acceptable definition of who should be regarded as refugees for that purpose, and debate over whether the right of return mentioned in international documents applied to displaced masses of people as well as to individuals who had never been nationals or permanent residents of Israel. It was also argued that, even where individuals

possessed the right of return, states were entitled to limit that right for the protection of national security, law and order, public health, or morality. The Israeli government insisted that "the entry into Israel of masses of refugees would pose a very real threat to security, law and order, and the viability of Israel's social fabric, as well as to the demographic viability of Israel as the world's only Jewish state—an issue of no small moral import."[81]

In practical political terms, the issue had been dealt with on the Israeli side in fairly blunt language since the 1949 Lausanne peace conference. A Knesset resolution in 1961 expressed the Israeli stance succinctly: "The Knesset resolves that it is not possible for Arab refugees to return to the territory of Israel, and the only solution to the problem is to resettle them in the Arab countries."[82] In 1998, the Israeli government spokesman during the Likud government under Benjamin Netanyahu, David Bar-Illan, expressed Israel's rejection of the Palestinian position as follows:

> There is no way that 1948 refugees can return to beyond green line Israel. . . . The war in 1948 was started by the Arab states and by the Arab population of this country . . . and the whole refugee problem which resulted from the assault is the responsibility of the aggressors. . . . In effect a population exchange occurred in which 800,000 Jews were forced to leave Arab countries . . . and were absorbed and integrated into Israel.[83]

Discussions Concerning the Right of Return During the 1990s

Although the right of return remained beyond political discussion within Israel, the provisions of the Oslo Accords, beginning with the Declaration of Principles of 13 September 1993, did not rule out the theoretical possibility of persuading Israel to allow certain categories of Palestinians to return to live in Israel as Israeli citizens. In the context of a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and its neighbors, Oslo excluded nothing.

With the final status negotiations provided for under Oslo in mind, a range of private organizations and think tanks, university academics, and officials operating in their private capacities sought creatively to develop an informed discussion of the problems and opportunities confronting policymakers so far as the refugee issue was concerned. Such informal activities, including some under the broad umbrella of the Multilateral Working Group on Refugees established under the Madrid conference framework, proved remarkably durable—and a valuable forum for engagement between influential Palestinians and Israelis—despite the disappointments experienced in other areas of the peace process.

Throughout the 1990s, and especially during the period when the Oslo process was the only serious framework for peace negotiations, Palestinian

spokemen said very little in the public domain about the right of return. Most kept to the line that all UN resolutions had to be fulfilled, among them Resolution 194 (III). Arafat insisted that the day was approaching when the flag of an independent Palestine would fly over the mosques and churches of Jerusalem, but he generally avoided dealing in specific terms with the right of return to Haifa and Jaffa.

It was clear by the early 1990s, at least to those around the Palestinian political elite, that practical concessions would have to be made by the Palestinians to the Israeli position if at least some justice was to be realized for the 1948 refugees.[84] Even if the Palestinian side remained committed in principle to the rights arguably enshrined in Resolution 194 (III), the PLO's eventual acceptance of that resolution in December 1988 coincided with its recognition of the state of Israel, giving rise to the inference that the resolution's application was open to negotiation.[85]

Senior Palestinian officials such as Faisal Husseini and Abu Ala'a assured their Israeli interlocutors during the 1990s that the right of return would not change the demographic balance of the Jewish majority in the state of Israel.[86] Nabil Sha'ath and Faisal al-Husseini indicated that the Palestinian leadership was considering, as an acceptable method of implementing Resolution 194 (III), a "return" to within the borders of the Palestinian state. Under that formula, "the refugees' right to return to their *homeland* would be substituted for the uncompromising insistence on their right to return to their homes, so long as the principle of an absolute right to return [was] not compromised and provided that payment of compensation would not disqualify refugees from repatriation to the Palestinian entity."[87]

There was active, if still inconclusive, investigation and negotiation by both Israeli and Palestinian negotiators below the leadership level on central aspects of the refugee issue. The consistent theme of the Palestinian side in those discussions was that the *implementation* of Resolution 194 (III), however that resolution was understood or interpreted, would necessarily be without prejudice to Israel's sovereignty and security as a Jewish state.

Outside the public realm, the issues of return, compensation, and an agreed narrative concerning the events of 1948 were addressed in a constructive manner in a series of confidential discussions in Sweden involving Shlomo Ben-Ami and Gilad Sher on the Israeli side, and Abu Ala'a and Hassan Asfour on the Palestinian side, prior to the Camp David meeting in July 2000. According to media reports, the Israeli strategy was to secure historic concessions from the Palestinians on the right of return, in return for Israeli concessions on the depth of its withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967.[88]

As mentioned in Chapter 3, there were reports in the aftermath of the Camp David summit between Chairman Arafat, Prime Minister Ehud Barak and President Bill Clinton that Barak was prepared to countenance, as

part of a comprehensive deal, the return under family reunion provisions (that is, not as a matter of right) of up to 100,000 refugees to Israel proper.[89] Further intensive discussions followed the unsuccessful outcomes of the Camp David meeting, reflecting a conviction among many officials that the meeting had failed because of fundamental errors of process and political judgment among those participating, rather than because the substance of the issues themselves proved too difficult.[90]

Held mostly at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, the discussions following Camp David (which led to the negotiations at Taba in January 2001) sought, among other matters, to tie the return of refugees to a mechanism of implementation that would provide alternative choices of destination for refugees while limiting the numbers returning to Israel proper. There was detailed discussion concerning the modalities of dealing with the refugee issue, including compensation, incentives for refugees to choose the Palestinian state ahead of all other possible destinations, and disincentives to choose Israel. The discussions also aimed at placing the burden of the decision on the refugees themselves and imposing time limits for their personal choices (including loss of refugee status for those who failed to make a choice); adding territory to Gaza in the framework of land exchange with Israel to facilitate a solution for refugees in Gaza; and addressing the resolution of the situation of refugees in Gaza and Lebanon first.[91]

The situation reached between Palestinian and Israeli officials (but not, it must be stressed, at the political level) at the end of the decade is outlined in the so-called Moratinos document, an account of the state of play in the Taba talks in January 2001, prepared by the EU envoy Miguel Moratinos.[92] Although not completely authoritative, because it did not reflect adequately the dynamics of the negotiations but rather encapsulated, more or less, where they stood at one point in the process, the Moratinos document nevertheless provided an indication of the direction in which both sides were headed on the eve of the Israeli elections that saw the defeat of the Barak government.

The extent to which ultimately there was agreement on the refugee issue among officials at Taba is uncertain, but it is clear that both sides were increasingly prepared to explore creative ideas. According to the document, both sides suggested, as a basis for negotiation, that a just settlement of the refugee problem in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 242 must lead to the implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III). It was agreed that the issue of the refugees was central to Israeli-Palestinian relations, and that a comprehensive and just solution was essential to creating a lasting and "morally scrupulous" peace. There was progress toward an agreed joint narrative on the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees, although no agreement was reached on a historical narrative in the general text of an agreement.

The Palestinian side reiterated that the Palestinian refugees should have "the right of return to their homes in accordance with the interpretation of [Resolution 194 (III)]." Israeli officials did not acknowledge that Resolution 194 provided a right of return as such but "expressed . . . understanding" that the "wish to return as per wording of [Resolution] 194" would be implemented within the framework of programs of return and repatriation to Israel, to Israeli swapped territory, and to the Palestine state, and would include rehabilitation in host countries and relocation to third countries. Preference would be accorded to the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon. The Palestinian side stressed that these programs would be subject to the individual free choice of the refugees and would not prejudice their right to their homes in accordance with its interpretation of Resolution 194.

The Moratinos document also records that the Israeli side informally suggested a three-track 15-year absorption program, which was discussed but not agreed upon. The first track referred to absorption into Israel. No numbers were agreed, but a nonpaper referred to 25,000 returnees in the first three years of the program; a notion of 40,000 in the first five years of the program was raised verbally. The second track referred to the absorption of Palestinian refugees into Israeli territory that would be transferred to Palestinian sovereignty. The third track referred to the absorption of refugees in the context of a family reunification scheme. The Palestinian side reportedly insisted the negotiations could not start without an Israeli opening position. It also maintained that Israel's acceptance of the return of the refugees should not prejudice existing programs within Israel, such as family reunification.

The creativity and commitment of officials and experts on both sides throughout the period that ended with the Taba discussions laid a promising basis for further negotiations at the political level, but the election of Ariel Sharon's government and the carnage of the second intifada put an end to that process. If the discussions had preceded the Camp David summit, and if that summit meeting had been approached more constructively by each of the parties involved, the frustrations that led to the outbreak of the second intifada might have been eased for long enough to see Barak win a further term in office and the exploration and negotiation of the Taba platform at the political level.

Even by the end of the Taba discussions, however, it was politically inconceivable that the PLO could publicly have accepted Israeli pressure to abandon insistence on the right of return to Israel. Arafat never did so in any formal sense although, while struggling for his own survival in February 2002, he referred to the need for

> a fair and just solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees who . . . have not been permitted to return to their homes. We understand Israel's demographic

> concerns and understand that the right of return of Palestinian refugees, a right guaranteed under international law and Resolution 194, must be implemented in a way that takes into account such concerns.[93]

While stopping well short of abandoning the right of return in principle, and capable of being read in negative terms by the more cynical, the statement was generally seen as evidence that Arafat would be prepared, in the context of a comprehensive settlement based on an independent Palestinian state on the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, to reinterpret the right of return in terms that would give Israel considerable comfort.[94] But even if Palestinian refugees, in different locations and among different social classes, were to have concluded that return was not going to be an option available to them in practice, recognition by Israel of the tragedy that its establishment brought upon the Palestinian people, combined with acknowledgment of the refugees' right to return to their former homes was to many Palestinians an essential condition of true reconciliation.[95] Insistence on the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their homes in accordance with their interpretation of Resolution 194 (III) represented, and continues to represent, a fundamental principle of Palestinian refugee political life.

Compensation

Compensation remained a lower-priority political issue among Palestinians, including refugees, during the 1990s than the demand to exercise the right of return. Although it was an area where progress was recorded at the Taba talks, compensation remains an issue explored mainly in nongovernmental frameworks by those who would wish to assist the key parties in addressing the question, if and when it should move to greater prominence in the peace process.[96]

Among many Palestinians, the idea of nonreturnees claiming compensation has tended to be viewed as a less politically and morally acceptable approach than demanding the exercise of the right of return, or the return of properties occupied since 1948 by Israel.[97] For those reasons, and possibly others—including reluctance to accept Israeli sovereignty in respect of the wider issue and perhaps because the sums offered as compensation were not considered adequate—very few Palestinians appear to have pursued the possibility of claiming compensation from Israel under the Israeli Absentees Property Compensation Law of 1973.[98]

Some analysts have suggested that by accepting Resolution 194 (III), the Palestinians in effect accepted the principle of compensation as an alternative to repatriation if the latter should prove impossible in practice.[99] For most Palestinians, however, compensation and the right of return are not mutually

exclusive: those refugees who were allowed to return would also be entitled, in the Palestinian view, to compensation.[100] It will be recalled that Paragraph 11 of Resolution 194 (III) stated that compensation should be paid to those refugees "choosing not to return *and* [emphasis added] for loss of or damage to property which under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the authorities or Governments responsible."

According to the Moratinos document, both sides agreed to the establishment of an international commission and an international fund as mechanisms for dealing with all aspects of compensation. Both sides also felt that there should be a fast-track procedure for "small-sum" compensation and for property losses below a certain amount. There was also progress on Israeli compensation for material losses, land, and expropriated assets, including agreement on payment from Israel into the international fund. The sides did not agree on the approach to the calculation of this payment—the Israeli side argued that the calculation should be based on a macroeconomic survey to evaluate the assets, whereas the Palestinian side argued for the sum to be calculated on the basis of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), the Israeli Custodian for Absentee Property, and other relevant data with a multiplier to reach a fair value.

The Moratinos document also suggested that there was agreement at Taba that the implementation of the agreement would constitute a complete and final implementation of UN Resolution 194 (III) and therefore end all claims. Those analysts who have examined the question of compensation in detail, however, have no illusions about how difficult it would be to address, let alone to resolve, its political, legal, and financial complexity.[101] In the words of Donna Arzt, "Many of these issues may not realistically ever become resolvable, due to overly complicated fact patterns, politically-charged negotiating positions, unavailability of funding sources, or the lack of exact legal standards."[102]

The compensation question cannot be resolved, or perhaps even be considered in detail, except as part of a larger settlement of the core issues surrounding Palestinian sovereignty. Those issues include the location of boundaries between Israel and a Palestinian state, the extent of population transfer between the two states and of absorption of refugees in their host countries and elsewhere, the future of Arab East Jerusalem, and the future of Jewish settler property in areas that would become part of the Palestinian state.[103]

While the constructive approach adopted at the Taba talks was encouraging, it is far from certain whether Israel and the Palestinians could ever agree formally upon final answers to such questions. Moreover, since Israelis are unlikely to accept moral or legal responsibility for the exodus of Palestinian refugees in 1948, they are unlikely to accept efforts to impose

upon Israel a financial responsibility for compensation arrangements beyond those obligations they have accepted and provided for under existing arrangements in regard to absentee property.

At Taba, the Israeli side requested that the issue of compensation to former Jewish refugees from Arab countries be recognized, while accepting that it was not a Palestinian responsibility or a bilateral issue. The Palestinian side maintained, unsurprisingly, that as Palestinians had played no part in the exodus of Jews from Arab countries, this was not a subject for bilateral agreement. Israel is likely, nevertheless, to maintain its insistence that a right to compensation exists for Jews who were forced to leave Arab countries (especially Iraq, Syria, and Egypt) that were belligerent states in 1948.[104]

The issue of compensation of Jews who left Arab countries during and after 1948—some of whom left voluntarily, others of whom were forced to leave, and many of whom were forced to leave their property and assets behind—has a degree of psychological and political impact among Israelis that the Palestinians and the Arab countries cannot entirely dismiss or ignore. If Israel were to participate in compensation arrangements, it would be no simple matter in the Israeli domestic context to reach decisions about how Israel would pursue those issues and what level of priority they would be accorded among wider negotiating goals. While such a debate was in progress, an astute Palestinian approach would perhaps see the Palestinian side supporting the universality of such claims and focus on the quality of resolution of injustice, wherever it can be proven, with a view to arguing for its application in due course to their own situation.

Many other questions remain unanswered that are central to the logic of compensation and the principles on which it should be based. Is compensation an obligation—legal, political, or moral—and if so, for whom? In crude but realistic terms, from a donor perspective at least, if it should come to implementation of any agreed outcome, what national interests would donor governments serve by paying compensation? How could and should the burden of doing so be apportioned between them?

Other questions and issues include the evidentiary basis for claims, who should receive compensation, and whether it should be distributed on the basis of individual cases—an approach Western donors would strongly resist—or collectively, or both, and in what proportions in the latter case. Loss-based approaches to compensation (including loss of income-earning potential) would appear likely to reiterate patterns of income distribution that applied in 1948. It would need to be debated whether this would be a more acceptable approach among both refugees and donors than standardized per capita payments. The advantages and disadvantages of different possible approaches have yet to be explored.

Other issues include who would be entitled to make claims—the few remaining 1948 refugees only, or their descendants? Governments hosting

Palestinian refugees would be likely to demand compensation for their previous and continuing costs. Jordan, and possibly other host countries, would be likely to present demands for compensation for having facilitated the presence of the refugees over the past five decades, although the question of whether the presence of the refugee population in each case has been a net economic gain or loss to the countries concerned has probably not yet been critically examined. It would also need to be determined whether the payment of compensation on that basis would be at the expense of the total resources available to the refugees. The Palestinian Authority and donor governments would have to decide whether refugee (and host government) claims for compensation would be settled at the expense of the demands of nonrefugee Palestinians, whose present economic circumstances may be as bad, or worse, as those of some refugees.

It would also be necessary to reach agreement on the linkages between compensation, territorial outcomes, and resettlement. It would need to be determined whether the refugees, if compensated, would be able to stay in place, if they so wished, and protected from new pressures to depart their host countries, including Lebanon.[105] There would need to be guarantees provided for their security, including the right of non-*refoulement,* and agreement reached on what part the international community should play in that respect.[106] Although the Moratinos document indicates that both sides agreed to the establishment of an international commission and an international fund to deal with all aspects of compensation, there appears to have been limited attention given to how the compensation process might be made to operate, for how long, and according to whose mandate.

There are wide discrepancies between estimates of possible Palestinian ambit claims. The Harvard-based Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations, in a paper written by Joseph Alpher and Khalil Shikaki, has suggested that individual compensation to Palestinians, largely financed by Israel, might amount to $15–20 billion.[107] Other estimates range from $92 to $147 billion for property costs alone, according to some widely quoted authorities, or even higher depending upon the formula adopted.[108]

Estimates of compensation demands running into hundreds of billions of dollars contrast sharply with total donor disbursements by the international community following the conclusion of the Oslo Accords. In 1994–1998, in support of the Oslo process, the international community pledged $4.1 billion in assistance for Palestinian reconstruction and development, of which some $3.6 billion was committed against specific projects and $2.5 billion was actually disbursed by the end of 1998.[109] Rex Brynen has suggested that unless conditions change significantly, the total amount available to finance compensation payments from all sources (including Israeli contributions, international donors, the dissolution of UNRWA, and

the transfer of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza) is likely to be less than $13 billion. It may be as little as $1.3 billion.[110]

Having limited resources to distribute among competing global demands upon their aid budgets, donors would also need to satisfy themselves about the long-term financial and political sustainability, both among the Palestinians and within the wider donor community, of assistance programs focused on resettlement and reintegration of refugees. Financing compensation or reparations, as such, would appear to have little prospect of winning political support among international donors, or being accepted as "development assistance," at least in the currently accepted use of that term by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Other Elements of Refugee Mythology

Two other elements of Palestinian refugee mythology during the 1990s need to be mentioned only briefly in this overview. The first was the notion that the issue of Palestine should be regarded, as some commentary in the UN context suggested, as "the most serious threat to peace with which the United Nations must contend."[111] The second was the suggestion that the international community had accepted and continued to bear the responsibility for bringing about a peace in which the Palestinian people could exercise what the UN referred to routinely as their inherent, inalienable right of national self-determination.

The first claim could simply be dismissed, at least in the circumstances of the 1990s, as an absurdity. There were more dangerous situations confronting the international community than the situation facing the Palestinian refugees, despite the parlous situation some refugees endured. Where wars had occurred between Israel and the Arab states, the sources of that conflict had reflected national interests and insecurities not related in any direct sense to the Palestinian refugee issue. In addition, the more the national concerns of the parties were addressed on a bilateral basis, and the further the Arab-Israel conflict moved from the central concerns of major powers, the more remote appeared to be the possibility of local disputes between the parties assuming military overtones.[112]

The second claim, concerning the ongoing responsibility of the international community for restoration of the rights of the refugees, was highly questionable. In practice, at the political level it amounted to little beyond the production of political and legal arguments in UN bodies—where a majority view in support of such arguments was usually readily forthcoming—concerning the need for Israel as a member state of the UN to uphold principles endorsed by the international community and reflected in UN instruments.

The processes that had actually led to the defusing of the Arab-Israel conflict to that point had little if any UN input beyond the establishment of the benchmark Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which enshrined the relinquishment of territory occupied in the 1967 war as central to an eventual resolution of the conflict. UN observer forces (the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization [UNTSO] and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force [UNDOF]) also played a useful role monitoring truce and disengagement agreements between Israel and its neighbors, but their effectiveness depended entirely on the goodwill and mutual consent of the parties.

The passage of Resolution 181 (II) by the UN General Assembly in 1947 was clearly a major triumph for Zionist diplomacy and a prelude to the 1948 conflict and the human disaster for the Palestinians that developed around it. But the UN and its local representatives were never more than a small part of the total picture that emerged in Palestine after World War II.

The 1948 conflict had its roots in much earlier measures and approaches on the part of the British government. As an imperial power (and moreover one whose political leaders had chosen to indulge biblical notions of larger purposes and higher aims)[113] and later as the League of Nations mandate power, Britain bears the primary responsibility for allowing the establishment of a Jewish national homeland. British officials had been mindful from the mid-1920s of the consequences for the Palestinians of British policy approaches, but those consequences did not sway British ministers.

Whether or not the British government had thought through the possible consequences of their approach in the aftermath of World War I, it set in course events whose gathering momentum proved irresistible. The energy, vision, and political sophistication of Jewish efforts to achieve a state grew stronger as Nazism took hold in Europe and compelled Jewish leaders of the *Yishuv* to do whatever was necessary to secure the rapid growth of Jewish immigration fleeing those pressures.[114] Successive British governments failed to revise earlier decisions in good time as their wider consequences for the Palestinians came to be better understood.

Britain finally moved in May 1939 to reverse its 1937 decision supporting partition and to make the Jews a permanent minority in an Arab state by bringing Jewish immigration to an end. That step was driven not by concern to address the rights of the Palestinians but mainly by calculations of the potential cost to British interests regarding India, and its control of the Suez Canal, of allowing such immigration to continue. So long as war loomed with the Axis powers, British policy was driven by concern not to face the prospect of having to deal simultaneously with the Arab uprising in Palestine and with hostilities in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.[115]

Nor was the Arab side without fault. The inability of either the Palestinians or the Arab states to produce a coherent response to the Zionists—

and their resort in 1948 to military intervention for political reasons—consolidated the problem. There was also a collapse of will among the Palestinian traditional leadership in the face of superior Zionist power. As hostilities spread from December 1947 to May 1948, Palestinian Arab society fell apart.[116]

Laying the blame for what transpired at the feet of the UN—or Western governments for that matter—also ignored other key elements of the total picture. Those included the consequences of the rise of Nazism in Germany; the impact upon Western, especially U.S. public opinion of the Holocaust and the support offered by the Palestinian political leadership at the time to the Nazis; and the sustained drive, determination, opportunism, occasional demagoguery, and overall vision of the Zionist enterprise. The remnants of European Jewry emerged from the trauma of near-extinction to confront a war-exhausted Britain with neither the will nor the manpower to sustain an indefinite mandate. With Britain facing widespread international support for the Jewish community in Palestine, including from the United States and the Soviet Union, the political drive of the Zionist movement proved ultimately to be unstoppable.[117] Neither the Palestinians nor the fledgling Arab states were able to master the political terrain in the UN, or in key capitals including Washington, sufficiently well to alter those outcomes.

The UN failed to prevent the events that saw the creation of the refugee problem, but it acted with vigor and determination to deal with the humanitarian consequences of the conflict. As discussed, it sought to address the question of the return of the refugees through the mediation efforts of Count Bernadotte, and later at Lausanne. It fulfilled its responsibilities to the extent that it was politically realistic to do so, and cannot reasonably be blamed for failing to solve problems that had already been found insoluble by governments. Individual UN representatives more often than not demonstrated—and continue to demonstrate—exemplary courage and commitment in the face of danger. Because of the limits of the politically possible, however, it was not open to the UN to reverse the changes that had taken place on the ground. And neither the fact that the UN had a role in the events that led to the Palestinian refugee exodus, nor the fact that the UN continued to witness demands for change in the situation between Israel and the Palestinians, placed an obligation upon the UN to bring about those changes through its own intervention. The UN could not act—and cannot act—outside the framework of the interests of the major powers. Invitations from either Israel or the United States to play an effective part in the search for a solution were not forthcoming.

The United Nations and its agencies have continued to devote around 10 percent of the total UN budget of $2.5 billion to consideration of the Palestine question and measures to assist the Palestinians in exercising their rights. That commitment, and the associated proliferation of Palestinian-related UN bureaucracy, is far out of proportion with other nationalist causes, such as

Tibet.[118] More than twenty UN General Assembly resolutions dealing with the Palestinians are considered each year, involving extensive consultation and preparation among delegations and in capitals.[119] It is ironic, from an Israeli perspective, and entirely appropriate from the Palestinian viewpoint, that the organization that gave international legal impetus to the creation of the state of Israel has become the largest single bureaucracy promoting the interests of the Palestinians.[120]

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the core elements in the late 1990s of Palestinian collective memories and mythologies and perceived rights as refugees to redress vis-à-vis Israel. Those included, most importantly, the right of return to Israel and compensation. It was also noted that refugees maintained a belief that the international community was morally and legally obliged to support and assist them until their rights were realized.

Although some of the mythologies discussed here raise a range of complicated issues that present no easy answers, it is important to bear in mind that they are deeply embedded in Palestinian refugee society. They were naturally and inevitably part of the Palestinian refugee political agenda of the 1990s.

Efforts to introduce changes in those mythologies, should any party have sought to do so, were bound to be constrained by the weakness of communication between political elites and nonelites in Palestinian society generally, by the ongoing strength of familial and other traditional patterns of authority and loyalty in refugee society, and by the sense of separateness that surrounded the Palestinian refugees within Palestinian society and in host countries. The power and, most importantly, the continuity of Palestinian refugee mythologies must be understood in that context.

There was no evidence, among the Palestinians, of the sort of renarrativization of collective memories that had begun among Israelis during the 1990s. Denial of the legitimacy of some refugee mythologies by Israelis did not affect the strength with which they were upheld on the Palestinian side. Nor was there much willingness among Palestinian refugees—in contrast to the Palestinian political leadership—to examine critically what such core mythologies as the right of return should mean in practice.

Notes

Chapter-opening epigraphs are from the following sources: Nadav Shragai, "The Settlement of East Acre," *Ha'aretz,* 27 September 1998, reprinted in *FOFOGNET Digest,* 26–27 September 1998; and Les Carlyon, *Gallipoli* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2001), p. 9.

1. See, for example, the erroneous claim that Paragraph 11 of UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of 11 December 1948 "emphasised the necessity to assist [Palestinian] refugees until they return." BADIL Resource Centre, *The Right of Return: Joint Statement Issued by Palestine Right of Return Initiatives in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Canada-USA, London,* 11 December 2000.

2. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Warner Books, 1991), p. 331.

3. It has been suggested that the aim of the 1936 revolt was not to drive the Jewish community out but to make it realize that it formed part of a predominantly Arab area. After 1948 the idea of coexistence disappeared, "replaced by that of a 'return' to the lost paradise." Alain Gresh, *The PLO: The Struggle Within,* rev. ed. (London: Zed Books, 1988), p. 30, citing Nabil Sha'ath, "Palestine of Tomorrow," speech at the Second International Symposium on Palestine, Kuwait, 13–17 February 1971, in *Fateh,* 23 March 1971.

4. For the full text of Resolution 181 (II), see Institute for Palestine Studies, *The Palestinian-Israeli Peace Agreement: A Documentary Record,* rev. 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1994), pp. 174–196.

5. United Nations, *The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem, 1917–1988,* prepared for and under the guidance of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, United Nations, New York, 1990, p. 144.

6. Ibid., p. 143. Israel moved its capital to the western area of Jerusalem in 1950.

7. Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1997), p. 3; A. (Lex) Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (London: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 12.

8. Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 76–84. See also Ilan Pappe, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947–1951* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1992), pp. 113–121; and Eugene L. Rogan, "Jordan and 1948: The Persistence of an Official History," in Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 108–110.

9. Rogan and Shlaim's *The War for Palestine* provides an excellent review of the stances taken by the major Arab states at the time of the conflict.

10. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 3.

11. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* pp. 3–4. Shortly after the passage of Resolution 181 (II), David Ben Gurion estimated the emergent Jewish state would have a population of 520,000 Jews and 350,000 Arabs; including Jerusalem, the Jewish state would have faced the prospect of having a population of 1 million, 40 percent of whom would have been non-Jews. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,* p. 28.

12. In a speech on 17 November 1958 to the UN General Assembly, chief Israeli representative Abba Eban cited remarks attributed to George Hakim, the Greek Catholic archbishop of Galilee, that "the refugees had been confident that their absence from Palestine would not last long; that they would return within a few days—within a week or two; their leaders had promised them that the Arab armies would crush the 'Zionist gangs' very quickly and that there would be no need for panic or fear of a long exile." Walter Laqueur, ed., *The Israel-Arab Reader:*

A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 190.

13. Benny Morris notes that "the gradual destruction of the abandoned Arab villages, the cultivation and/or destruction of Arab fields and the share-out of the Arab lands to Jewish settlements, the establishment of new settlements on abandoned lands and sites and the settlement of Jewish immigrants in empty Arab housing in the countryside and in urban neighbourhoods [meant] that the refugees would have nowhere, and nothing, to return to." Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,* p. 155.

14. Judith Miller, *God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 336.

15. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 16–17.

16. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,* pp. 275–285.

17. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 61–62.

18. It was also decided to exclude Palestinian refugees who were assisted by UNRWA from the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 7, 65–67.

19. Ibid., p. 66.

20. See comments by Phillip Ruddock, Australian minister for immigration and multicultural affairs, in *Canberra Times,* 15 May 1999.

21. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* pp. 11–12.

22. Benny Morris, "A Second Look at the 'Missed Peace,' or Smoothing Out History: A Review Essay," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1994), pp. 80–81. See also Avi Shlaim, "Husni Za'im and the Plan to Resettle the Palestinian Refugees in Syria," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 15, no. 4 (Summer 1986), pp. 68–80; and Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 20–26.

23. Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel,* pp. 28–31; Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), pp. 73–76. For an outline of the discussions between Israel and Syria in the Mixed Armistice Commission, chaired by the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), concerning the three demilitarized zones from 1949 to 1951, and bilaterally with U.S. support between January and May 1953, see Shlaim, *The Iron Wall,* pp. 67–76.

24. Morris, "A Second Look at the 'Missed Peace,'" p. 80. See also Henry Cattan, *The Palestine Question* (London: Croon Helm, 1988), p. 83.

25. Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 192.

26. For an outline of thinking on the issue on the part of the Jewish community in Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s, see Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,* pp. 23–28. For a Palestinian view, see Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of Transfer in Zionist Political Thought, 1882–1948* (Washington, DC: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1992).

27. Schemes for transfer were a frequent matter of discussion among the Zionists, and were raised in private in negotiations with the British, though there was no mention of them in public. Simha Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians, 1917–1947* (London: Croon Helm, 1979), pp. 69–70, 82.

28. Ibid., p. 263.

29. Fred C. Bruhns, "A Study of Arab Refugee Attitudes," *Middle East Journal* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1955), p. 134.

30. Pappe, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* pp. 87–88.

31. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,* p. 294.

32. Ibid., p. 286.

33. Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 87. For further criticism of Morris's conclusion from a pro-Palestinian perspective, see David Seddon, "Making History: Myths and Realities of the Palestinian Struggle," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2, no. 1 (1989), pp. 214–216; Norman Finkelstein, "Myths Old and New," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1991), pp. 66–89; and Nur Masalha, "A Critique of Benny Morris," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1991), pp. 98–114.

34. Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1980), pp. 97–103.

35. Benny Morris, "Refabricating 1948" (review of Ephraim Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli History: The "New Historians"* [London: Frank Cass, 1997]), *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1998), pp. 83–86. See also Benny Morris, "Falsifying the Record: A Fresh Look at Zionist Documentation of 1948," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1995), pp. 44–62; and Benny Morris, "Revisiting the Palestinian Exodus of 1948," in Rogan and Shlaim, *The War for Palestine,* pp. 37–59.

36. For bitter criticism of Morris from an Israeli Right-wing perspective, see the report by Dan Perry in the Associated Press, 22 December 1997.

37. State of Israel, Government Press Office, *The Refugee Issue: A Background Paper,* October 1994, p. 1. For an earlier, more comprehensive statement of the Israeli position, see extracts from a speech on 17 November 1958 to the UN General Assembly by chief Israeli representative Abba Eban, in Laqueur, *The Israel-Arab Reader,* p. 190.

38. David Ben Gurion, speech to the Knesset on 11 October 1961, cited in Pappe, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* pp. 88–89.

39. Pappe, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* p. 89.

40. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,* pp. 62–63.

41. Ibid., pp. 64–65.

42. Walid Khalidi, "Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), pp. 4–20.

43. For a balanced and insightful review of both Morris's and Khalidi's arguments, which concludes that Plan D seemed to be an important factor accounting for the exodus, see Pappe, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* pp. 87–99.

44. Ibid., p. 93.

45. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* p. 14, citing, among others, Henry Cattan and Issa Nakleh.

46. Salman H. Abu-Sitta, *The Right of Return: Sacred, Legal, and Possible Too* (version 25, February 1996) (Beirut: Al Mustaqbal al-Arabi), p. 23.

47. John Bagot Glubb, *A Soldier with the Arabs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957), p. 251.

48. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,* p. 1.

49. It could also be argued, as Kanan Makiya (Samir al-Khalil) has done, that the specific political and intellectual characteristics of contemporary Arab society, by which he would presumably include that of the Palestinians, can render certain forms of political convention or imagery largely immune from revision. Refugee mythologies may be a case in point. But the question is far from being that simple, and I do not wish to debate, in this book, Makiya's characterization of the contemporary state of Arab intellectual debate as sterile. Makiya is not alone, however, in his criticism. Kanan Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Silence, and the*

Arab World (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), p. 25. Fatima Mernissi's argument that in Arab society, freedom of thought is "demonized and associated with Kharijite rebellion and disorder" would seem to be in line with the critique Makiya advances. Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World,* translated by Mary Jo Lakeland (Indianapolis: Addison-Wesley, 1992), p. 47.

50. The archival record of individual refugee experience, especially the documentation that was created for each of the registered Palestinian refugees by UNRWA—including records inherited from its predecessor body, the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees, and the voluntary agencies (the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the American Friends Service Committee [Quakers]) that assisted relief efforts in the early period of the refugee crisis—is becoming increasingly fragile and at risk of being lost altogether, despite efforts by UNRWA to raise funds for its preservation.

51. *International Herald Tribune,* 1 April 1997.

52. "In every classroom [in a boys' school near Jabaliya, Gaza,] is a map of prewar Palestine, with the names of villages that have long since disappeared. A mural in the playground depicts an old man and a pigtailed girl gazing across a fence of barbed wire, the man telling the child: 'My homeland is there.'" "Palestinian Refugees: Adrift for Decades," *Philadelphia Enquirer,* 12 May 1998.

53. Rosemary Sayigh, "Palestinian Camp Women as Tellers of History," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1998), p. 45.

54. Ibid., pp. 43–45, 49. There are, however, conflicting views on this issue. Citing a study of Palestinian refugee camps in 1991 by Basma Kodmani-Darwish, Elia Zureik notes that by an overwhelming majority the Palestinians in Lebanon saw the intifada as the most important political event in recent times, and between one-half and two-thirds preferred to see it continue as an armed struggle. Elia Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996), p. 62, citing Basma Kodmani-Darwish, *The Palestinian Question: A Fragmentary Solution for a Dispersed People,* Ph.D. thesis, Institut d'Études Politiques, Paris, 1994.

55. Don Peretz, *Palestinian Refugees and the Middle East Peace Process* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1993), p. 72, quoted in Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* p. 230.

56. United Nations General Assembly, *Palestine—Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator: Resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948,* UN General Assembly Official Records (GAOR), 3rd sess., pt. I. The relationship between UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) of 1948 and UN General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) of 1949, which established UNRWA, is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

57. *Progress Report of the UN Mediator for Palestine,* UN GAOR, 3rd sess, supp. 11, UN doc. A/648, 16 September 1948.

58. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* p. 243.

59. Morris documents these outcomes in detail. See Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,* esp. pp. 155, 214.

60. Donald Neff, "U.S. Policy and the Palestinian Refugees," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), p. 103.

61. David Shipler, *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), p. 55. For compelling evidence to this effect based on oral histories and interviews with Palestinian refugees in Jordan, see Randa Farah, "Crossing Boundaries: Reconstruction of Palestinian Identities in Al-Baq'a Refugee Camp, Jordan," in Riccardo Bocco, Blandine Destremau, and Jean Hannoyer, eds., *Palestine, Palestiniens: Territoire national, espaces communautaires* (Amman:

Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain [CERMOC], 1997), pp. 259–294.

62. Danny Rubinstein, *The People of Nowhere: The Palestinian Vision of Home* (New York: Times Books, 1991), p. 130.

63. Salim Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations: From Madrid to Oslo II* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996), pp. 44–45.

64. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* p. 244; Rashid Khalidi, "Observations on the Right of Return," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1992), p. 29.

65. Elia Zureik, however, makes this claim. See Elia Zureik, "Palestinian Refugees and Peace," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1994), pp. 16–17.

66. Donna Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens: Palestinians and the End of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1996), p. 65.

67. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 232–242.

68. BADIL Resource Centre, *A Palestinian State Cannot Replace the Refugees' Right of Return! Call for Protection of Palestinian Refugee Rights,* 26 April 1999, *FOFOGNET Digest,* 27 April 1999. See also BADIL Resource Centre, Rosemary Sayigh, and Salman Abu-Sitta, "Palestinian Refugees: Reclaiming the Right of Return," *Al-Majdal,* BADIL Resource Centre, no. 1 (March 1999), pp. 1–3.

69. Mark A. Heller and Sari Nusseibeh, *No Trumpets, No Drums: A Two-State Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991), p. 95.

70. Edward Said, "Palestine Agenda," in Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969–1994* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), pp. 145–146. Said adds (p. 149) that the PNC declarations "were implicitly recognizing a state that offered us nothing whatever, except the by-now empty formulas of Camp David, or the openly genocidal threats of population transfer and extreme brutality."

71. The full text of the declaration appears in Institute for Palestine Studies, *The Palestinian-Israeli Peace Agreement,* pp. 268–272. The quotation appears at p. 269.

72. Jerome M. Segal, "A Choice-Based Approach to the Right of Return," *Ha'aretz,* 1 February 2001.

73. For the full text of both speeches, see Institute for Palestine Studies, *The Palestinian-Israeli Peace Agreement,* pp. 212–231, 283–297.

74. Both cited in Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations,* p. 47.

75. David Ben Gurion's comments are cited in State of Israel, *The Refugee Issue,* p. 4.

76. Pappe, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* pp. 208–211.

77. Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens,* p. 22.

78. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,* pp. 282–283.

79. Ibid., pp. 275–285, including mention of the assessment of U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson at p. 283.

80. Ibid., p. 285.

81. State of Israel, *The Refugee Issue,* p. 10.

82. Quoted in Simha Flapan, "The Knesset Votes on the Refugee Problem," *New Outlook* 4, no. 9 (December 1961), p. 8, cited in Nawaf A. Salam, "Between Repatriation and Resettlement: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1994), p. 21.

83. Quoted in Barbara Demick, "Palestinian Refugees: Adrift for Decades," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 12 May 1998, p. 1. David Bar-Illan went on to contend that

any compensation for Palestinian refugees should be coupled with compensation for Jews forced out of Arab countries.

84. Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations: From Madrid to Oslo II,* p. 45.

85. Nawaf A. Salam, "Between Repatriation and Resettlement: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1994) p. 21.

86. Danny Rubinstein "The Right of Return," *Ha'aretz,* 4 February 2002.

87. Salam, "Between Repatriation and Resettlement," p. 21. Emphasis in the original.

88. Uriya Shavit, and Jalal Bana, "Everything You Wanted to Know About the Right to Return but Were Too Afraid to Ask," *Ha'aretz*, 5 July 2001.

89. BADIL Resource Centre, *Camp David II, UN Resolution 194, and a Durable Solution for Palestinian Refugees,* 21 July 2000, *FOFOGNET Digest,* 20–21 July 2000.

90. On the failure to reach agreement at Camp David in July 2000, and on discussions prior to and during the Taba negotiations, see Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors," *The New York Review of Books*, 9 August 2001; Ron Pundak, "From Oslo to Taba: What Went Wrong?" *Survival* 43, no. 3 (Autumn 2001); Shavit and Bana, "Everything You Wanted to Know About the Right to Return," *Ha'aretz;* and Deborah Sontag, "Quest for Mideast Peace: How and Why It Failed," *The New York Times,* 26 July 2001.

91. For information on discussions prior to the Taba negotiations, see the references cited in endnote 90. In addition, see the exchange between Gershon Baskin, codirector of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI) and Aaron Lerner of the Israel Media Research and Analysis (IMRA) concerning discussions with Nabil Shaath on proposals for handling the refugee issue, in *FOFOGNET Digest* 19 November 2001.

92. Akiva Eldar, "'Moratinos Document': The Peace That Nearly Was at Taba," *Ha'aretz,* 14 February 2002.

93. Yasir (Yasser) Arafat, "The Palestinian Vision of Peace," *The New York Times,* 3 February 2002.

94. Arafat went on to say: "Left unresolved, the refugee issue has the potential to undermine any permanent peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis. How is a Palestinian refugee to understand that his or her right of return will not be honoured but those of Kosovar Albanians, Afghans and East Timorese have been?" Ibid.

95. Amira Hass, "Painful Historical Crossroads," *Ha'aretz,* 2 December 1988.

96. Valuable work has been done, on a preparatory and exploratory basis, by the Palestinian Refugee Research Network, led by McGill University and supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office. See especially Palestinian Refugee ResearchNet and International Development Research Centre, *Report on the Stocktaking Conference on Palestinian Refugee Research, Ottawa, 8–9 December 1997,* Ottawa, February 1998, pp. 25–27; and Palestinian Refugee ResearchNet and International Development Research Centre, *Report of the Palestinian Refugee ResearchNet and International Development Research Centre Workshop on Compensation as Part of a Comprehensive Solution to the Refugee Problem,* Ottawa, 14–15 July 1999.

97. I have been reminded of this view on many occasions, including by Palestinian colleagues such as Salman Abu-Sitta and others who find it personally distasteful to debate possible levels of compensation. In the words of one Palestinian participant in a seminar on the compensation issue in 1999, "The homeland [is] not

for sale." Terry Rempel, "The Ottawa Process: Workshop on Compensation and Palestinian Refugees," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 1 (Autumn 1999), p. 41.

98. Meron Benvenisti and Eyal Zamir, "Private Claims to Property Rights in the Future Israeli-Palestinian Settlement," *American Journal of International Law* 89, no. 2 (April 1995), p. 301; Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 44–45. Fisk refers to there being only 170 successful applications in the previous five years.

99. Salam, "Between Repatriation and Resettlement," p. 21.

100. Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations,* p. 44.

101. For an informative and insightful overview of the debate between Israeli and Palestinian analysts over the compensation issue, see Rempel, "The Ottawa Process," pp. 36–49.

102. Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens,* p. 97.

103. Don Peretz, *Palestinian Refugee Compensation,* Information Paper no. 3 (Washington, DC: Centre for Policy Analysis on Palestine, May 1995), p. 18.

104. See the previously mentioned comments of David Bar-Illan; and State of Israel, *The Refugee Issue.* See also Don Peretz, *Palestinian Refugee Compensation.*

105. For discussion of possible redistribution of the Palestinian refugee population among Western countries, the Occupied Territories, and the Gulf Arab countries and Israel, see Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens,* p. 90. Judith Kipper also suggested, in the context of a possible strategy for Iraq following the lifting of UN sanctions and before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in April 2003, that the United States should sponsor a package whose elements would include an agreement that Iraq would resettle Palestinian refugees from Lebanon as part of the labor force required to rebuild Iraq. Judith Kipper, "It's Time for America to Prepare an Endgame Plan for Iraq," *International Herald Tribune,* 19 March 1998.

106. If refugees were to be compensated collectively, decisions would have to be made regarding who would determine the form of development assistance needed, and on what basis of knowledge of refugee demands and actual needs. Consideration would also need to be given to the possibility that refugees might reject the mechanisms demanded by the host governments/Palestinian Authority or that the Palestinian Authority would be unable to deal with what had been until now regarded as a responsibility of the international community. It also would be necessary to agree upon the part to be played by host governments in determining how compensation should be received, and what claims (including taxation) might they wish to make on the individual recipients of such compensation. As part of bringing about agreement to an overall approach, it would be necessary to demonstrate to host governments whether their refugee populations were net burdens or contributors, and whether their economic impact might change if they chose to be permanently resettled. The absorptive capacity of the refugee community, and the Palestinian Authority, for compensation or other financial assistance would need to be considered, together with possible options for the provision of noncash benefits (vouchers for education, health, housing) and soft loans, and the time frame within which such benefits might need to be distributed.

107. Joseph Alpher and Khalil Shikaki, *The Palestinian Refugee Problem and the Right of Return,* Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Paper no. 98-7 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), cited in Rex Brynen, *Financing Palestinian Refugee Compensation,* paper presented at the Palestinian Refugee ResearchNet and International Development Research Centre (PRRN/IDRC) workshop on "Compensation as Part of a Comprehensive Solution to the Palestinian Refugee Problem," Ottawa, 14–15 July 1999, *FOFOGNET Digest,* 6 November 1999.

108. Sami Hadawi and Elia Kubursi, *Palestinian Rights and Losses in 1948* (London: Saqi Books, 1988), p. 183, quoted in Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process,* p. 103. Rashid Khalidi suggests a figure of $92–147 billion for property, and $40 billion in reparations, based on an estimate of $20,000 per person for 2 million people. Rashid Khalidi, "The Palestine Refugee Problem: A Possible Solution," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 3, no. 4 (Autumn 1995), pp. 72–78, cited in Manuel Hassassian, "The Political Refugee Problem in the Light of the Peace Process," in Joseph Ginat and Edward J. Perkins, eds., *The Palestinian Refugees: Old Problems—New Solutions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), p. 71. The possible scale of compensation claims is analyzed in detail in the report of the PRRN/IDRC workshop on "Compensation as Part of a Comprehensive Solution to the Refugee Problem," cited in endnote 107.

109. Council on Foreign Relations, Report of an Independent Task Force, *Strengthening Palestinian Public Institutions: Executive Summary,* Michel Rocard, chairman, Henry Siegman, project director, Yezid Sayigh and Khalil Shikaki, principal authors (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1999), p. 1.

110. Rex Brynen, "Imagining a Solution: Final Status Arrangements and Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26, no. 2 (Winter 1997), p. 50.

111. United Nations, *The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem,* p. 3.

112. For an insightful discussion of the causes of conflict in the Arab-Israel context, see Janice Gross Stein, "The Managed and the Managers: Crisis Prevention in the Middle East," in G. R. Winham, ed., *New Issues in International Crisis Management* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988).

113. For a discussion of Arthur Balfour and David Lloyd George in this regard, see Barbara Tuchman, *Bible and Sword: How the British Came to Palestine* (New York: New York University, 1956), pp. 310–322.

114. Jewish immigration to Palestine in the early 1930s stood at around 4,000 per year, but it increased to 30,327 when Hitler came to power in 1933 and rose to 61,854 in 1935. Con Coughlin, "Of Blood and Betrayal," *The Telegraph* (London), reprinted in the *Sydney Morning Herald,* 16 October 2000.

115. Chanan Reich, *Australia and Israel: An Ambiguous Relationship* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), p. 10.

116. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,* p. 19.

117. David J. Goldberg, *To the Promised Land: A History of Zionist Thought from Its Origins to the Modern State of Israel* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 222–225.

118. UN bodies that were created specifically to promote the case of the Palestinians, or that have a sizable amount of their resources devoted to Palestinian interests, include the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; the Division for Palestinian Rights (currently part of the Department of Political Affairs of the UN Secretariat); the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL); the Department of Public Information; the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; the (vestigial) United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine; UNRWA; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO).

119. Michael Shannon, "UNlimited Support: The Palestinian 'Industry' at the UN," *The Review* (Australia-Israel and Jewish Affairs Council) 24, no. 9 (September 1999), pp. 8–10.

120. Ibid.

5

UNRWA's Place in Refugee Mythologies

UNRWA has been the vehicle for international actors seeking to deal with the refugee problem, the possessor of material resources coveted by regional actors, a political symbol and tool for Palestinians, and a successful humanitarian organisation with its share of difficulties traceable to a unique mandate, structure and environment.
—Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is an integral but little acknowledged part of the Palestinian entity.[1] From the perspective of the Western countries that are its key sources of financial support, UNRWA is a highly successful delivery body for humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees. It has impressive operational and political skills. It also has linkages, through the issue of Palestinian refugees, to the Middle East peace process.

Among Palestinian refugees, however, in addition to playing an important humanitarian role, UNRWA has represented the embodiment of mythologies central to their aspirations and identity. Created shortly after the disaster of 1948, the agency came, over time, to be seen to represent the international community's commitment to upholding the political rights of refugees, as they understood them. At the same time, it provided a vital source of direct support in the areas of education, health, and relief and social services to which they believed they were entitled, pending the rectification of their grievances. The place of UNRWA in the Palestinian refugee experience is therefore directly relevant to Palestinian refugee mythology. That mythology, in turn, has had an important influence on the agency.

UNRWA

The United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR) was established in 1948 to coordinate the relief work of the UN specialized agencies

and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that had provided the first international humanitarian response to the Palestinian refugee crisis, as it emerged from late 1947 onward.[2] The United Nations had established UNRPR to oversee relief aid to the Palestinians after the International Refugee Organization (IRO) declined to deal with the Palestinian case owing to its limited mandate, which did not extend beyond the European refugee situation.[3]

The United Nations General Assembly established UNRWA through Resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949, acting under Article 20 of the UN Charter, which authorizes the General Assembly to establish such subsidiary organs as it deems necessary to the performance of its functions. Accepting that there was a need to continue to provide assistance to the refugees "to prevent conditions of starvation and distress . . . and to further conditions of peace and stability" (Operative Paragraph 5),[4] UNRWA was created, in essence, to move the emergency nature of the initial refugee relief effort onto a more sustainable footing pending a resolution of the refugee issue.[5] According to Operative Paragraph 7 of Resolution 302 (IV), UNRWA was established

> (a) To carry out in collaboration with local governments the direct relief and works programmes as recommended by the Economic Survey Mission;[6] [and]
>
> (b) To consult with the interested Near Eastern Governments concerning measures to be taken by them preparatory to the time when international assistance for relief and works projects is no longer available.

As Howard Adelman has pointed out, unlike the situation in 1948 that led to the creation of UNRPR, mass starvation was not an imminent risk in 1950. As discussed below, it appears likely that the main reason for establishing UNRWA was to foster stability among the Arab states while working to integrate the Palestinian refugees in their new locations.[7] UNRWA's mandate was not necessarily open-ended. The agency proved, however, to be no more transient than many other UN institutions and arrangements in the region whose original purpose was to stabilize the situation.[8] As discussed in more detail below, plans for refugee resettlement were abandoned by 1956 in the face of funding difficulties and political opposition among regional countries to integrating refugees in host countries through a works program.[9] The mandate of the agency allowed considerable freedom, however, for creative interpretation according to changing circumstances.

UNRWA and Resolution 194

Important for understanding both the initial orientation of UNRWA and the mythologies surrounding it are the references in Resolution 302 (IV) to

Resolution 194 (III), the latter now widely seen, especially among Palestinians, as establishing the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their homes in what was by that time Israel.[10] Also important in that regard are three somewhat contradictory references: first in the second (less often cited) part of Paragraph 11 of Resolution 194 (III) to resettlement, economic and social rehabilitation, and compensation; second, in Resolution 302 (IV) to pursuit of the implementation of direct relief and works programs recommended by the UNRPR Economic Survey Mission, and third in the foreshadowing in Resolution 302 (IV) of discussions with "interested Near Eastern governments" concerning measures to be taken in preparation for a time when international assistance for relief and works projects was no longer available.

The political sensitivity surrounding the creation of UNRWA was clear from the outset. In an apparent attempt to reach a compromise between the resettlement intentions implicit in the references mentioned above and Arab determination to set a political backdrop or frame of reference for the operation of the agency that would limit the impact on efforts to secure the right of refugees to return to what was now Israel, Resolution 302 (IV) contained three separate references to Resolution 194 (III).

The first preambular paragraph of Resolution 302 (IV) recalled UNGA Resolution 212 (III) of 19 November 1948, which established UNRPR and Resolution 194 (III), affirming "in particular the provisions of paragraph 11" of the latter resolution.

Operative Paragraph 5 of Resolution 302 (IV) then recognized

> that, without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph 11 of the General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, continued assistance for the relief of the Palestine refugees [was] necessary to prevent conditions of starvation and distress among them and to further conditions of peace and stability, and that constructive measures should be undertaken at an early date with a view to the termination of international assistance for relief.

Resolution 194 (III), Paragraph 11, was again referred to in Operative Paragraph 20 of Resolution 302 (IV), where UNRWA was instructed to consult with the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), which was established by UN Resolution 194 (III) "in the best interests of their respective tasks, with particular reference to paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948."

Despite these references, Resolution 302 (IV) was remarkable for its lack of precision concerning the objectives of UNRWA and its relationship to the search for a solution to the refugee problem. Apart from directing the agency to consult with UNCCP, the General Assembly gave no specific guidance as to the agency's role in the search for political solutions to the humanitarian issue.

It is difficult to argue that those references had—then or now—a binding effect on the character of the agency, or that they determined the duration of its mandate. The references did *not* directly relate the future of the agency to any specific form of settlement of the refugee issue—with or without return to Israel, comprehensive, just, or otherwise. They did not set out criteria by which it could be concluded that the refugee issue was in fact resolved. Indeed, the fact that the same resolution directed the agency to consult with UNCCP "in the best interests *of their respective tasks* (emphasis added)" suggested that there was to be separation between the search for a political solution to the refugee problem, through UNCCP or directly between the parties, on the one hand, and the conduct of relief and works programs through UNRWA, including preparation for the cessation of international assistance for those programs, on the other hand.

The ongoing separation between the humanitarian and the political aspects of the refugee issue was strengthened by the fact that Resolution 194 (III) assigned the political aspects of the overall conflict, previously handled by the UN mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte, including presumably the political aspects of the refugee problem, to UNCCP.[11] It was also consistent with the earlier UN General Assembly decision in establishing UNRPR, which relieved the mediator of humanitarian relief functions and enabled concentration of his efforts upon securing the truces that in 1949 became formal armistices.[12]

As discussed in Chapter 4, by the time Resolution 302 (IV) was adopted in December 1949, Israel had already rejected two formal calls from Count Bernadotte for the return of the refugees, and the Arab states had rejected a conditional Israeli offer at the Lausanne conference for the return of 100,000 refugees. UNRWA was certainly seen as having the responsibility for coordinating efforts to alleviate the worst of the conditions facing the refugees, pending the resolution of their situation. However, rather than being intended to continue functioning until refugees were able to secure the implementation of their right of return, UNRWA, as Benjamin Schiff has pointed out, "was geared by the United States and Britain to transform the region economically and thereby facilitate the refugees' 'reintegration' into the Middle East; behind UN declarations that the refugees were entitled to return to their homes, international planning focussed on their resettlement."[13]

The Economic Survey Mission (ESM), headed by Gordon Clapp, chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority, had been established by UNCCP to examine the economic situation in the countries affected by the hostilities. The report it submitted in November 1949 recommended an integrated program to enable governments to overcome economic dislocation, to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement, and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees, and to reintegrate them into the economic life

of the region on a self-sustaining basis. The report avoided admitting that resettlement had replaced repatriation as the goal of the exercise. It referred instead to vaguer concepts such as reintegration and rehabilitation of refugees.[14] But the intention of the ESM report was clearly to establish public works programs along the lines of the work of the Tennessee Valley Authority "to give refugees an opportunity to work where they now [were]."[15]

By 1956, however, the grand vision of peace through economic development and resettlement had been thwarted by opposition from refugees who wanted to return to their homes, and by the political conflicts among the regional states whose cooperation was essential for the operation of large-scale projects. Externally inspired notions of integration could not surmount the political realities of the region, including the fundamental fact that the refugees demanded repatriation, not resettlement. They were formally supported in that stance by regional Arab governments (despite the apparent willingness of Syria, as mentioned earlier, to absorb substantial numbers of the refugees as part of a bilateral deal with Israel). The refugees were not repatriated because that was unacceptable to Israel; they were not formally resettled because Arab states other than Jordan had little incentive to absorb them; and Palestinian nationalism—as well as the social factors described earlier in this book—militated against integration outside their traditional lands.[16]

Resettlement schemes, which included regional water management plans, small-scale training and employment-creating projects, works projects such as road building and tree planting, and subsidization of resettlement in such places as Libya and Iraq to set up small businesses or farms, all failed.[17] The focus for UNRWA then shifted to one of pragmatic humanitarianism, servicing longer-term and more programmatic needs in areas of education, health, and relief services.[18]

Efforts from the earliest days of UNRWA to trim inflated refugee rolls, especially in Jordan, and to depoliticize agency schools fostered refugee suspicions that the creation of UNRWA was part of a plot to liquidate their cause through assimilation and resettlement schemes.[19] There was also perhaps a tendency for the agency to become a surrogate target for its clients' frustrations and anger at the perceived responsibility of the Western countries for their fate.[20]

While such suspicions lingered, and the level of service provided by UNRWA was frequently criticized,[21] perceptions of the agency generally became more positive over the following decades. The reasons for that change are discussed below. However, UNRWA's disavowal of any suggestion that it could or should be involved in the *political* outcomes of the refugee issue probably helped in that regard. In a 1996 discussion paper on the issue of harmonization of its services with those of the Palestinian Authority and host countries, for example, UNRWA took the view that

> the agency which was created to provide relief and other services to the Palestine refugees until the problem was resolved, cannot be part of the political resolution of the problem, but only of the technical and programmatic one. . . . [T]he Agency has to remain sensitive to refugee perceptions and concerns and not be perceived as adopting a strategy which could be misinterpreted.[22]

Notwithstanding those sentiments, UNRWA and its Advisory Commission,[23] which was established by Resolution 302 (IV), also took it for granted that the agency's role would continue until such time as the refugee issue was resolved.[24] UNRWA's mandate currently extends to June 2005, but its perpetuation has long been informally institutionalized, for political reasons, by the General Assembly.[25] Although UNRWA could be starved of funds by its key donors, it has become almost inconceivable that the General Assembly would formally phase out the agency, except at the request of the Palestinians or the Arab countries in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and neighboring Arab states.

Other Elements of Resolution 302

The elements of Resolution 302 (IV) mentioned earlier as being inconsistent with the political focus on the right of return in Resolution 194 (III) were consistently or largely disregarded in the light of regional developments and in accordance with the political concerns of key countries. The first such element was the mandate to carry out the works programs referred to in Operative Paragraph 7 (a) of Resolution 302 (IV). As discussed earlier, those programs did not materialize because of political resistance among host countries and refugees to the notion of resettlement.

The second element to be disregarded was the clear intention of Resolution 302 (IV), as reflected in Operative Paragraph 5, that the relief activity of the agency was to be scaled back in favor of development ("works") programs. Operative Paragraph 6 of Resolution 302 (IV) noted that direct relief "should be terminated not later than 31 December 1950 unless determined otherwise by the General Assembly at its fifth regular session." In practice, however, a focus on humanitarian assistance in various forms prevailed from the early 1950s onward even though for a brief period after the conclusion of the Oslo Accords, donors seeking to establish a "peace dividend" for the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank found it convenient to sponsor capital works projects through UNRWA's Peace Implementation Programme (PIP).

The third element that remained largely ignored by UNRWA was the mandate in Operative Paragraph 7 (b) to consult with "Near Eastern governments" concerning measures to be taken by them when assistance for

relief and works was not available. The reasons for not pursuing that element of its mandate were essentially political: there could be little interest among, or benefit to, either donors or host governments in addressing the hypothetical possibility of exhaustion of the agency's funds.

UNRWA was not inclined to pursue the question of long-term financing with host countries unless there was a serious prospect of insolvency. But insolvency could, in theory at least, be avoided by reducing services to whatever level the agency was able to deliver. Despite recurrent financial crises, the agency stopped short of instigating formal discussion on the possibility of financially induced cessation of its overall role, nor was the matter seriously considered in the periodic renewals of the agency's mandate by the UN General Assembly.

Prior to the conclusion of the Oslo Accords, none of the other parties concerned, including the major donor countries, would have wished UNRWA to raise the subject of its own demise, given the wider political issues and sensitivities involved. The political circumstances that applied in 1949 changed dramatically over the following decades, and the agency's financial situation deteriorated. But regional governments were not prepared to address the hypothetical situation of the agency being abandoned by the donors.

Key donors, for their part, had a particular incentive during the 1990s not to set that hare running, for fear of affecting the eventual handling of the refugee issue in the final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). There was scope for broadening the focus of those negotiations, as agreed under the Declaration of Principles, signed in September 1993, to encompass the situation of the refugees and the displaced persons in Jordan, with Egypt engaged in that process as well. Raising questions about the longevity of the agency and the durability of the assistance provided in Lebanon and Syria would also have complicated the bilateral negotiating process between those countries and Israel, for no obvious purpose or benefit to any party.

Only two enhancements of UNRWA's original mandate seem important. The first was the development by UNRWA during the intifada of initiatives to provide limited protection to Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation in Gaza and the West Bank, especially the Refugee Affairs Officer (RAO) program. The RAO program was resented by Israel, which considered the monitoring of Israeli security operations to be a departure from UNRWA's mandate.[26] That program was transitory, being overtaken in effect by the end of the intifada and, after 1993, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority under the Oslo Accords.

The second enhancement was the acceptance by the General Assembly, after the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993, that the agency would contribute to efforts to support the peace process by contributing to

socioeconomic improvements among the Palestinian refugee population. On 10 December 1993, the General Assembly called upon UNRWA, within a framework of strengthened cooperation with the UN specialized agencies and the World Bank, "to make a decisive contribution towards giving fresh impetus to the economic and social stability of the occupied territories, and note[d] also that the functioning of the Agency remain[ed] essential throughout its area of operations."[27]

The resolution endorsed PIP, which UNRWA had already instituted with donor support in October 1993 as a major effort to improve services and infrastructure for the Palestinian refugees.[28] In addition to its regular programs, UNRWA implemented over $215 million in PIP projects, which were concentrated overwhelmingly in Gaza and the West Bank. Projects included construction and social development, business loans, and upgrading of schools, clinics, and women's program centers. However, by 1997, as the absorptive capacity of the Palestinian Authority for external assistance grew, funds provided by donors to PIP amounted to only $11 million, compared to over $68 million in 1994.

UNRWA's Record

UNRWA has a remarkable record. In the late 1990s it was the largest UN body in the Middle East, employing over 20,000 people and operating or supporting some 900 facilities.[29] It was among the most operational agencies within the UN system, directly providing services to beneficiaries, planning and executing almost all of its own projects and activities, and building, administering, and operating or sponsoring its facilities.[30] Voluntary contributions by donor governments, which financed almost 95 percent of the agency's programs, seldom kept pace with increasing demands and needs, but the agency carried on.[31] UNRWA was, in effect, a quasi-state institution whose responsibilities extended to areas of education, health, and social services that would otherwise be handled by national governments.[32]

At the end of the 1990s UNRWA had provided high-quality elementary and preparatory education to at least three successive generations of refugees. UNRWA's 643 schools accommodated 436,000 students, whose success rate was consistently above that of nonrefugee students of host countries undertaking the same curricula. It provided advanced training to agency teachers and, when donor funding was available, university scholarships to promising students. It had graduated over 50,000 students from its vocational, technical, and teacher training centers.

UNRWA had met the basic health needs of the refugees consistent with the principles and concepts of the World Health Organization (WHO) and standards achieved by host governments for their citizens. It provided basic

but good health care service with emphasis on mother and child care, and helped combat disease and eliminate epidemics through mass immunization. Infant and child mortality rates had been reduced by two-thirds among refugees. UNRWA provided family planning services, hospitalization subsidies, food assistance for the most vulnerable population groups, and environmental health services in the fifty-nine refugee camps in which it operated.

UNRWA's relief and social services program ensured that those Palestinian refugees who suffered the greatest socioeconomic disadvantage were able to meet their most basic needs for food, shelter, and other essentials. It was successful in encouraging self-reliance among refugees through poverty alleviation schemes including support for small-scale enterprises, training schemes, and small loans and grants for businesses.

UNRWA provided food, shelter, and medical aid to Palestinians in emergencies, and fostered programs for women, youth, and refugees with disabilities through 127 agency-sponsored community centers, which were increasingly community managed. The agency's Special Hardship Program assisted over 45,000 refugee families who were unable to support themselves.

In achieving these remarkable results, UNRWA proved itself to be more than an aid agency. The peculiar character of UNRWA, including the political significance of the organization, was summed up by Benjamin Schiff in 1995:

> For more than 40 years UNRWA has labored under its "non-political" label, all the while saturated by politics. Barred from the high politics of regional and global conflict, it was irrelevant to peace efforts or conflict strategies, but its operations shaped the context in which high politics were played out. Changing international alignments and sympathies governed agency fund-raising; relations with the host states dictated maneuverability on the ground. UNRWA helped Palestinian refugees individually to survive their statelessness, to prosper in regional labor markets, and thus to survive as a political force. And as a symbol of the United Nations' declaration of the Palestinian right to return and compensation, UNRWA was inevitably recognised as something other than a purely humanitarian organisation.[33]

UNRWA's Operational Character

The immediacy of the refugee crisis to which relief bodies responded in 1948 meant that UNRWA inherited a largely reactive rather than proactive and strategic operational approach. The short-term focus of its early structure (such as annual budgets) became firmly entrenched, reflecting both Arab political sensitivities and the misplaced optimism in some donor quarters, especially in the United States, that a solution to the refugee problem would be found within a few years through regional economic development programs.

The agency's operational orientation reflected the need for sensitivity to the political concerns, of the Arab countries and the refugees alike, that nothing should be done by the UN that would suggest that the right of return was beyond realization. Refugee dwellings built to replace the tents of the first camps were (and are still) referred to by UNRWA as "shelters," not houses. Even as the situation for refugees on the ground grew more routine and predictable, modification of the agency's established governance, financial, and fundraising structures would have been, in Benjamin Schiff's words, political dynamite: "Formally admitting that the agency needed permanent, ongoing funding would have tarnished it as a symbol of the temporariness of the refugees' condition and the General Assembly's position that the refugees should be repatriated."[34] The Arab member states of the UN were reluctant to acknowledge domestically or in the UN context that the dispossession of the Palestinian refugees was likely to be ongoing and therefore require long-term strategies. They insisted that the mandate of the agency would have to be subject to annual renewal (later changed to renewal every three years).

The strengths of the agency were always most evident in emergency situations. Those situations ranged from providing shelter, rations, and education and medical care amid the traumatic conditions throughout the region of the early 1950s, and in the turmoil of Lebanon after the 1982 Israeli invasion, to the delivery of emergency supplies of medicine and laundry to hospitals and other refugee centers during periods of closure and other emergencies in the West Bank in the 1990s.

The highly pragmatic and politically sophisticated emergency-oriented operational ethos of the agency was reinforced from 1967 to 1987 by the need to respond to two international wars (1967, 1973), two civil wars (Jordan in 1970, Lebanon from 1975), two invasions by Israel into Lebanon (1978, 1982), and attacks by Israel and the South Lebanese Army against both Palestinian and Shia targets in South Lebanon that destroyed Palestinian shelters and UNRWA facilities. The emergencies in the West Bank and Gaza following the outbreak of the intifada in December 1987, and in Lebanon, enabled the agency to raise special funds in addition to its regular budget to expand maintenance and construction programs delayed by lack of resources.[35]

UNRWA remained little-known within the UN system, with its work in regard to refugees overshadowed by UN agencies more in the public eye. It was acknowledged as the primary party involved in representing the interests of the international community on the Palestinian refugee issue, but the General Assembly had created the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as the general UN agency for refugees on 3 December 1949, five days before it established UNRWA.[36]

UNRWA was not even the lead UN agency on Palestinian development assistance matters after the surge in donor assistance that followed signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords. That responsibility resided with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO), which was created for that purpose in 1994. Medium-term funding for startup costs and budget support for the institutions of the Palestinian Authority was undertaken through the World Bank–administered Holst Fund.[37]

UNRWA provided a long-term, though supposedly interim, response to the humanitarian aspects of the Palestinian refugee issue. It presented itself as providing, through the ongoing delivery of basic services to refugees, a degree of predictability for all parties in an otherwise volatile environment.[38] UNRWA was also a key contributor to the sense of imagined community among Palestinian refugees in particular, and by extension, among Palestinians in general at a time when the PLO was no longer capable of providing such a space for the 1948 refugees.[39] The agency became, in effect, part of an enduring management approach to the refugee problem.

As the vision of being an instrument for resettlement of refugees faded, UNRWA's senior management proved adept at working within the complexities and ambiguities of the regional political situation. It could not reinvent the setting in which it was based, including the political mythologies of the Palestinian refugees it served, nor did it seek to do so. The fulfillment of its objectives as a humanitarian agency required it to exercise high levels of political skill—at both the headquarters and the field level—in the delivery of its regular and emergency programs. UNRWA's operational character was highly attuned to the implications of functioning in a relatively well-educated, articulate, and politically active Palestinian social and political environment, as well as dealing with the intricacies of relations with Israel and with Arab host countries.

The dynamic interaction between refugees and UNRWA helped to shape the character of each. UNRWA was a United Nations agency and an instrument of the General Assembly. It was also, however, a Palestinian institution in terms of its employment. Only about 1 percent of UNRWA employees—albeit mostly in key decisionmaking positions—were "international" staff. The remainder—known as "area" staff—were exclusively Palestinian refugees.

The agency's mandate did not require it to deliver its own programs, though it generally adopted that approach. There had also been profound changes and improvements in the capacity of institutions in the region to undertake such functions since UNRWA commenced its operations in 1950. However, the dissolution of UNRWA to allow for the creation of alternatives for providing humanitarian services to the refugee community was considered unthinkable by the refugees, the host countries, and most of the donor

countries. The implementation of agency decisions remained almost entirely a Palestinian affair, both through the work of salaried Palestinian staff and also through refugee voluntary support and self-help projects.

The agency was formally no more than a service provider in the refugee camps, which in a legal sense were host government facilities. There were no policy impediments from UNRWA to the involvement of NGOs or other parties in the camps. The relationship between the agency and most other potential providers of services, however, apart from a limited number of mostly international nongovernmental organizations, often remained wary.

UNRWA was concerned to avoid interference from host governments with the delivery of its programs, fearing the possibility of a reduction in service standards and the misallocation or worse of UN funds if its own control were not guaranteed. As will be discussed later, there was also an underlying tension between the PLO and UNRWA in those areas where the agency's absolute commitment to probity led it to take a skeptical, if not critical, private view of the behavior of certain Palestinian institutions. Some PLO officials, for their part, tended to see the agency as patronizing and insensitive to their political needs.[40]

Alongside the influences of extended families and clans, social status, geography, and other factors, UNRWA was in practice part of the framework through which Palestinian experience and mythologies evolved. The loss of land strengthened attachments among refugees to social structures that were on the decline under the pressure of market forces before 1948; but the advent of the refugee situation "drove an almost obsessive striving for education, that offered itself as a new source of identity, dignity, and material security."[41] UNRWA's role as a provider of quality elementary and preparatory education, and subsequently its provision of vocational training, met that need.

The education and the employment opportunities that UNRWA's education program created, its health programs, and its humanitarian relief programs made camp life and life as a community in exile sustainable. It also provided a basis for rebuilding shattered lives within a structure not too unlike village society. UNRWA officials privately estimated that perhaps eight to ten individuals directly benefited from the salaries paid to each UNRWA employee. Job opportunities within the agency were highly sought after, despite competition, especially after 1994, from better-resourced UN and other international bodies. In Gaza and the West Bank, a UNRWA job was traditionally looked on as security for life, and lobbying for such positions through friends, relations, or political connections was commonplace.[42]

The fact that UNRWA facilities provided a socioeconomic basis and institutional framework for the preservation of refugee identity naturally had

political consequences. UNRWA facilities provided the institutional means, including pockets of civil society, through which refugee political aspirations were preserved. Those aspirations, and the Palestinian refugee political culture of which they were part, emphasized the distinctiveness—or at least the particularity of interests and concerns—of refugees from other Palestinians. There were other factors at work in that process, but the central place of UNRWA in the Palestinian refugee experience was undeniable.

UNRWA provided a bridging framework between traditional village society and thinking, on the one hand, and the demands and challenges of a changing, more politically sophisticated, and market-oriented society, on the other. Lack of sufficient resources during the 1990s to fund institution-building programs and other initiatives meant that more than 60 percent of UNRWA's women's program centers, as well as virtually all its community rehabilitation centers, youth activities centers, and community-based organizations in Gaza and the West Bank came to function without managerial support from the agency. All community rehabilitation and youth activities centers were managed by local committees and drew extensively on volunteer support. Although established for development reasons, those facilities also played, though indirectly, a part in the growth of political activity among the refugee community.

UNRWA was very successful in its establishment and empowerment of group-guaranteed savings and revolving loan funds through its microfinance and microenterprise credit program, launched in June 1991. In addition to providing working capital and investment funds to industries and service firms, the program was aimed at alleviating poverty and creating employment opportunities. Women's microenterprise retail outlets in Gaza were particularly supported by the agency and donors, notably the United States, under the program, which saw women entrepreneurs receiving 36 percent of the loans provided. As of 31 May 2002, the combined portfolios of these initiatives totaled just under $61 million and supported 50,282 loans to businesses in the industrial, service, trade, and commercial sectors.[43]

Women's program centers provided skills training for women and the disabled, technical assistance for income-generation enterprises, and public awareness campaigns on social issues such as early marriage, drug addiction, smoking, and domestic violence. They also were used by the refugee communities to provide support services for women such as counseling, legal advice, kindergartens, and child care facilities.[44] The agency—along with other Palestinian organizations such as the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW)—also helped to provide both a degree of security and more practical forms of assistance to the process whereby Palestinian women preserved and adapted traditional Palestinian costume and embroidery. Among Palestinians, the preservation of cultural identity had deliberate political

objectives, including as direct expressions of nationalist sentiment and the rejection of cultural appropriation by Israel of that heritage.[45]

Security and Incitement Issues

As mentioned above, the refugees themselves were in control of political activity within the camps, as well as the day-to-day decisions and activities of community and youth centers. UNRWA conducted occasional "audit inspections" of its own facilities to underline its concern to meet accepted standards of behavior for a UN institution. Beyond that, it scrupulously maintained its formal distance from those activities.

Between 1967 and 1994, Israel was in charge of security in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including the nineteen refugee camps in the West Bank and the eight camps in the Gaza Strip. After 1994, under the terms of the Oslo Accords, responsibility for security and law and order in area "A" (including all eight camps in Gaza and twelve of those in the West Bank) was passed to the Palestinian Authority, which entered UNRWA training centers from time to time, in violation of its UN status, to search for weapons. The remaining seven camps in the West Bank in areas "B" and "C" and in Jerusalem remained under Israel's security control.

Despite this, there were claims, especially from 2000 onward, that UNRWA was failing to report on activities of which it was presumed to be aware that posed a threat to Israeli security. Those activities, including bomb-making and indoctrination, recruitment, and dispatch of suicide bombers, thus allegedly made the agency a de facto accomplice to terrorism.[46]

Without being presented with the evidence upon which such claims were based, let alone receiving formal representations from the Israeli government about them, UNRWA could do little to counter such allegations.[47] In general, UNRWA's response was to point out that it was not mandated to act as a police force, to have an intelligence role, or to be otherwise responsible for security generally within refugee camps. It insisted that the only instance where allegations of misuse of agency facilities had a clear basis in fact arose during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, when evidence was uncovered that the PLO made use of UNRWA's Siblin Vocational Training Centre near Sidon for storage of arms and equipment and for military training. The agency responded immediately and effectively to remedy that failure.[48]

UNRWA was also alleged to be condoning incitement to hatred by the use in its schools of the textbooks and the education curricula of local host government schools.[49] The agency rejected such claims, pointing out that the overall aim of the UNRWA/UNESCO education program, which was agreed with host governments, was to provide within that framework "general

education, teacher and higher education and vocational and technical education for Palestine refugees in accordance with their educational needs, identity and cultural heritage."[50]

The agency pointed out that it used host country textbooks in its schools for legal, educational, and practical reasons, and developed supplementary curriculum materials for training teachers and where needed in schools. It argued that school textbooks were not neutral in any context. The selection of knowledge included in them was a political process and the Palestinians could not be expected to endorse an Israeli version of regional political developments. Radical curriculum changes, said UNRWA, would have to await a new political reality.

In the meantime, the agency pointed out, host countries stipulated that their curricula was to be used in all schools, including UNRWA schools. That approach allowed refugee children to move from UNRWA to non-UNRWA schools, particularly into secondary schools, to meet the entry and examination requirements of host countries' higher-education institutions and enter the job market with recognized qualifications.[51]

Controversy over textbooks and curricula missed the main point about the UNRWA education program, however: it would always be impossible in the Palestinian environment to separate teaching and teachers from political feelings. From the mid-1960s onward, for the second- and third-generation refugees, UNRWA schools were an important site of mobilization for the nationalist movement through teachers' fostering of nationalist ideas.[52] Jalal al-Husseini notes the Palestinian "touch" given by UNRWA teachers to curricula taught in UNRWA schools, such as informal references to Palestinian history and geography, became an important part of UNRWA education. The PLO, which benefited from the role of the camps as bastions of Palestinian nationalism, organized classes wherever it could (mainly in Lebanon) for refugee children after UNRWA's regular classes.

UNRWA's education system—or to be precise, the pedagogy practiced in its schools rather than its formal curricula and textbooks—was a key factor leading to the emergence of a new and more politically aware generation of refugees.[53] That process was reinforced by an understandable determination among refugees to preserve the memory of the 1948 catastrophe, including through narratives and photographic displays (for which UNRWA's photo archives were an unsurpassed source of material). Cultural celebrations in schools invariably commemorated refugee origins in Mandate Palestine, including the wearing of Palestinian costumes from villages and towns in what is now Israel.

Inevitably, alongside such activity there was vigorous political debate and activity, as there was in non-UNRWA Palestinian educational institutions. From the mid-1990s, especially during student elections in the mens' vocational training colleges, murals and political graffiti supporting violent

actions directed against Israel were commonplace. Celebration of the "martyrdom" of Palestinians engaged in acts of terror routinely found graphic and vocal expression. So far as possible, UNRWA concentrated on avoiding or at least minimizing the impact for its own operations of such practices and other encounters between refugees, Israelis, the PLO, and after 1994, the Palestinian Authority.

UNRWA Financial Crises

As noted earlier, UNRWA was seen from its inception as a temporary institution—albeit for entirely different reasons according to whether one was a Western donor government, a host country, or a refugee. Created on the basis of a voluntary funding system that avoided increasing UN members' financial obligations, UNRWA continued to depend upon the annual voluntary contributions of sympathetic states. UNRWA's budget was kept separate from the UN's regular budget. As an instrument of the General Assembly rather than the UN Secretariat, the agency was required to report to the President of the General Assembly, rather than to the UN Secretary-General.

While the General Assembly repeatedly voted to extend the agency's mandate and to congratulate it for the services it provided, reaffirmations of support for the agency from the General Assembly were not usually accompanied by commensurate levels of financial commitment by individual donors. Assistance from the UN itself was limited mostly to the funding of a modest number of international staff posts.

Host countries, for their part, were content to insist that the funds had to be found by the donor countries to meet the agency's needs. Declining to enter into discussion of the financial issue on the donors' terms, they pointed out that their own contributions to the refugees through services provided to their populations as a whole were already substantial. Jordan, in particular, defended its level of assistance to refugees through the provision of municipal services and access to Jordanian health and education facilities. It claimed in 1997 that the value of those facilities amounted to over $300 million per year.[54]

UNRWA therefore struggled to meet its immediate needs, including the effects of rapid population growth among refugees entitled to its services. It encountered and overcame financial crises in 1958–1959, 1965, 1969–1970, 1973, 1976, 1980–1981, and 1985 amid increasingly urgent pleas and warnings from the agency about the consequences for regional stability of financial collapse.[55] Donors' interest in the agency rekindled during regional emergencies. But the agency's ability consistently to avoid collapse, coupled with the inability until the late 1990s of its budgetary and planning systems to provide an accurate picture of its finances to either donors or, for that

matter, its own senior executives, also engendered a degree of skepticism among donors about the actual state of the agency's financial situation.[56]

The outbreak of the intifada in December 1987 gave renewed energy and, for a while, some international prominence and additional financial support to the agency. Nevertheless, its organizational culture remained overwhelmingly operational, rather than reflective and strategic. It was not a direct participant, for example, in any of the key negotiating fora that surrounded the peace process from 1991 onward. It took a low-key part in the multilateral discussions on refugees established under the Madrid framework from 1992.[57]

The unique, public-sector-like nature of the agency's functions and universal access to its services meant that it not only had to present project proposals to donors that were generally aimed at improving available infrastructure, or constructing new facilities to keep pace with demographic growth, but also had to find the resources to meet recurrent expenditures—for salaries, maintenance, materials, and other running costs—that would sustain those projects after their initial establishment.[58]

Until 1996, financial stringencies on UNRWA's part were generally focused on areas that did not directly affect services, such as travel costs, maintenance, and supplies. Much of the time, UNRWA was also able to draw down its reserves or "working capital," which in 1955 amounted to a little more than one year's expenditures.[59] The agency remained unable to borrow money, but it was prepared to use funds provided by the donor countries for projects under the Peace Implementation Programme that were not part of the agency's regular budget, to meet recurrent costs and to juggle its cash flow requirements. UNRWA firmly rejected criticism by some donor countries of that practice.[60]

Financial pressures were not spread uniformly across all five fields of the agency's operations.[61] In Jordan, for example, increasing numbers of the refugees were opting for education services provided by the host country government, since fewer Jordanian schools were double-shifted. Unlike UNRWA school week, the Jordanian school week also matched the hours of government employment. In the West Bank, about half the refugee school-age population was enrolled in Palestinian Authority elementary and preparatory schools. That was the case mostly where the location of Palestinian Authority schools made enrollment in them more convenient for the local refugee population, bearing in mind that in the West Bank over 70 percent of the registered refugees lived outside camps.

In contrast, especially, to the situation facing UNRWA in Jordan, the situation in Gaza deteriorated markedly during the 1990s. After 1995 the numbers of new starters in UNRWA elementary and primary schools rose in Gaza alone to over 11,000 per annum. That reflected the combined effect of the population growth rate of about 4.1 percent and the influx of families

following the conclusion of the Cairo Agreement between the PLO and Israel in May 1994, which established self-rule for the Palestinians in those areas.

In practical terms, in Gaza alone UNRWA had to find the funds to construct six new school buildings each year, and to find the salary and other funds to operate them on a double-shift basis (that is, housing and operating two separate schools within a single building). Donors could generally be found for the construction of new school buildings, but the recurrent costs associated with new schools and the maintenance of existing schools were increasingly hard for UNRWA to meet. The pressures of overcrowding and double-shifting in West Bank schools meant that many of those facilities were rapidly becoming dilapidated and in some cases unsafe.

The critical situation facing the agency, particularly in Gaza, had to be addressed. Diversion of funds to Gaza from UNRWA programs in other fields, while possible in theory, would have raised significant and politically sensitive questions about the strategic direction of the agency and the principle of uniform treatment between the agency's fields of operation. This was an issue that host governments monitored closely and all parties preferred to avoid.

UNRWA After Oslo

The launching of the Madrid process in October 1991 meant that the refugee issue was eventually to be addressed, albeit in a limited manner, in the peace process. More important, the inclusion of the refugee issue in the final status negotiations envisaged under the Oslo Accords meant that it was possible, for the first time, to see on the horizon that the UN General Assembly would eventually decide on the end of the agency's mission and its dissolution.[62]

At a time when most Western aid budgets were overstretched—from 1992 to 1997, total Western development aid fell by 21 percent in real terms[63]—UNRWA nevertheless maintained steady support from most of its traditional donors. UNRWA funding as a percentage of total net Western official development assistance (ODA) actually increased from 0.403 percent in 1992 to 0.449 percent (or 0.470 percent if Peace Implementation Program funding is included) in 1997.[64] In 1997 Palestinians in general already received more assistance per capita than any other developing country—about $225 per person per year compared to an average of $12.72 for developing countries as a whole. UNRWA received about $78 per registered refugee, compared to only $55 per UNHCR "person of concern."[65]

UNRWA's operating environment changed significantly, however, with the signing of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO in September 1993. Although overall financial support for UNRWA did not

decrease, Oslo meant that the international community increasingly shifted its aid and political focus to the state-building needs of the Palestinian Authority.[66]

With the ending of the intifada, the Palestinian refugee issue was also less the subject of media interest than refugee situations in other conflicts, including in Bosnia and Africa. Outside emergency situations, donors were inclined to give a higher priority to development assistance than to relief. Discussion developed within the aid bureaus of some donor governments about the respective merits of using UNRWA or dealing directly with the Palestinian Authority for the delivery of aid, or using other UN institutions such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The agency's structural budget deficit worsened as expenditure per refugee fell. According to UNRWA, average expenditure per registered refugee declined 29 percent from 1992 to 1996, from $110.4 to $78.2, not taking into account the effects of inflation. The total number of registered refugees increased over the same period from 2,648,707 to 3,308,133.[67]

At the same time, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, real per capita gross national product (GNP), a measure of potential living levels, declined 36.1 percent between 1992 and 1996 as a result of falling aggregate incomes and rising population growth. Per capita GNP in the West Bank and Gaza Strip declined an estimated 8.5 percent in 1996.[68] The declines were mainly attributable to the loss of employment in Israel, which particularly affected Gazans, and a decline in trade flows, which particularly affected the West Bank because access to Jerusalem was of considerable importance to commercial activity, following Israeli-imposed closures of the West Bank and Gaza in the aftermath of terrorist attacks. According to a World Bank assessment, Israeli restrictions on movement by Palestinians following terrorist attacks cost the Palestinian economy 15–20 percent of GNP in 1995–1997, more than offsetting the positive effects of aid.[69]

Meanwhile, the issue of sustainability of UNRWA's core programs—which continued to expand to accommodate an ever-increasing number of beneficiaries—posed a serious dilemma for the agency. Donor responses to the agency's needs for *project* funding after 1993 were largely positive, often drawing on funding lines within aid budgets that were different than those that funded ongoing programs through UNRWA's regular budget. As previously mentioned, however, there was less willingness to support *recurrent* expenditures in UNRWA or in any other context. The end result was a growing structural imbalance in the agency's budget whereby, for example, the agency received funds to construct additional classroom space, or clinics, but did not always have the funds to employ the teaching or nursing staff to make full use of those facilities.

UNRWA remained reluctant to acknowledge directly that it was reducing its services to the refugees, being acutely concerned by the wider political and managerial implications of such moves. Although the agency continued

to experience financial crises, with four consecutive years of budget deficits from 1993 onward, the political issues that had tended to shape the management approach of the agency over preceding decades remained essentially unchanged. Agency management had no intention to address, under the guise of prioritization of UNRWA's functions, the existential questions that the other interested parties—including the United Nations General Assembly—preferred to leave unasked.

Refugee Attitudes to UNRWA

The relevance to daily life of the services provided by UNRWA has varied according to the location and socioeconomic situation of individual refugees. Since Palestinian society is far from homogeneous, the importance attached to UNRWA as an expression of Palestinian identity and national aspiration has also varied. In some quarters, it is resented as paternalistic, anachronistic, and dependency-fostering. Most refugees, and certainly those from the camp-dwelling part of the refugee population, appeared, however, to regard the symbolic role of UNRWA as a critically important manifestation of international support for their status and their political aspirations. In the 1990s, resistance to prospective change on the part of the agency was especially obvious among those whose lives were focused around the camps it serviced.[70]

Randa Farah found that among the refugees she studied in Jordan, UNRWA remained a significant international organization, seen to be bound by UN statutes calling for the right of return. It represented an "extraterritorial space" through which refugees could negotiate their political, economic, and legal claims. It was therefore not surprising, she concluded, that the refugees expressed anxiety at the possibility of UNRWA's dissolution. They feared that the transfer of its services and activities to local authorities, whether in the host countries or in the areas under the Palestinian Authority, would be accompanied by their permanent resettlement and not their repatriation.[71]

The refugees themselves appreciated and used assistance from UNRWA but could also, in Benjamin Schiff's words, "be aggravatingly demanding, suspicious of, and at times outraged by, the agency."[72] The sense of insecurity and frustration arising from their situation in regard to Israel, the PLO, and their relationship with the agency was exploited by various politically active elements, including activists among refugee camp committees. At the same time, UNRWA's status as an international body that was created in recognition of, and in response to, their dispossession was increasingly widely appreciated among refugees. They welcomed the agency's role in providing services and employment, and the protection it provided within the limits of its capacities vis-à-vis Israel through the Refugee

Affairs Officer program during the intifada. For each of those reasons, UNRWA came to represent a psychological and, in some cases, a practical safety net for the refugee community.

UNRWA, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Palestinian Authority

Apart from the political sensitivity associated with memories of UNRWA's origins as a UN body aimed at resettlement of the refugees, some individuals in the upper echelons of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority were inclined to hold negative perceptions of the agency in its contemporary form. In part, this was because the agency's senior management was sometimes seen in Palestinian nationalist organizations such as the Palestine Red Crescent Society in Lebanon in the 1970s, and in the nascent quasi-state institutions of the Palestinian Authority, as patronizing and insensitive to Palestinian political concerns. Some senior UNRWA officials, for their part, had genuine concerns about the probity of some proposals for cooperation presented to the agency, sometimes with donor country support.

Jalal al-Husseini notes that UNRWA's refusal, usually on technical or financial grounds, "to represent Palestinian political interests" gave rise to considerable resentment toward the agency, including by refugee committees and by PLO member organizations. As mentioned earlier, UNRWA was accused of conspiring against the refugee cause; both international staff and the few Palestinians who secured high positions in the agency were criticized in that regard.[73]

Over and above those factors was an instinctive orientation in the PLO toward seeking control over, rather than cooperation with, any potential rival among the Palestinian population. UNRWA's control over substantial financial and human resources was at odds with that proclivity. For the most part, however, PLO influence on major UNRWA decisions was fairly weak. It was unable, for example, to prevent the transfer of UNRWA headquarters from Beirut to Vienna in 1978, or the suspension of UNRWA's basic ration program in 1982.[74]

The relationship between UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority, which represented a nation-building body rather than the politico-military movement the PLO embodied, was more complex. Palestinian Authority and PLO officials dealing with UNRWA were anxious to underline the importance they attached to the agency's ongoing role. However, senior Palestinian Authority officials were privately of the view that UNRWA did not necessarily have more to offer to Palestinians in general than other UN bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the

UNDP, and the World Bank, all of which strengthened their linkages with the Palestinian leadership after the Oslo Accords.

It served Palestinian Authority interests, in regard to the refugees, to maintain generally constructive relations with the agency, including by offering it practical support through representations (made formally by the PLO's Department of Refugee Affairs) to key donors seeking additional funding. That more strongly interests-based approach was also tempered at times, however, by other political interests. As discussed in Chapter 3, those included the concern of some senior to middle-ranking figures within the Palestinian Authority and PLO of being seen as vocal in defense of refugee interests, and supportive of demands advanced in the name of the refugee community. There were also complaints occasionally that UNRWA was providing education but not employment opportunities, and thus contributing to the emigration of talented youth from the occupied territories in search of work elsewhere.[75]

Levels and coverage of UNRWA services provide a popular target for criticism, as when, for example, in 1998 local Palestinian political activists in Qalqilya in the West Bank refused to allow refugee patients to pay increased hospital charges in accordance with agreements previously made by UNRWA with the Palestinian Authority. Palestinian Authority officials also sought from time to time to interfere at an operational level with the conduct of UNRWA programs—as happened in 1997–1998 in the West Bank in regard to allegations concerning the quality of flour distributed to impoverished refugee households.[76] Always politically astute at the operational level, UNRWA was generally robust, and for the most part, remarkably effective in responding to attempts at interference linked to political maneuvering within the Palestinian Authority.

Other Perceptions of UNRWA's Role and Mandate During the 1990s

UNRWA generally enjoyed a positive image among both host countries and donor governments. That image derived essentially from the fact that it was highly effective operationally, including in comparison to regional governments. It was seen as making a vital contribution to helping refugees deal with their situation, to find jobs and other economic opportunities, and (to those who saw this as important) to survive as a political force. As will be discussed later, UNRWA chose to emphasize to donors that its services were having a stabilizing influence on regional politics, though without seeking, or being called upon, to present evidence for that contention.

On the other hand, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, there were concerns among some key donors about the agency's management of its

finances. That reflected and reinforced a deeper concern to be reassured that the agency had a clear strategic vision and was working toward achieving it. Donor frustration with the agency's management grew during the 1990s because of what many donors perceived (not always correctly) as unwillingness on UNRWA's part to modify its approaches.

To the agency's staff, and their extended families, work for the UNRWA represented a secure livelihood and, for many, a professional commitment that carried with it important personal attachments. For some, as noted above, the agency was a platform for political aspirations. In that regard, its alleged or perceived shortcomings were a fertile source of political agitation and a more popular subject of political discussion than were the agency's achievements. UNRWA's Palestinian staff were among those most resistant to possible change in the status quo.

Among the regional Arabic and English-language media, the agency was little understood, especially in terms of donor perspectives. It was portrayed frequently as party to, or the victim of, political agendas designed to weaken the Palestinian refugees. Those agendas included the perceived shortcomings of the Oslo process and the role of the Palestinian Authority in fostering and adhering to it. Such perceptions were particularly evident during the financial crisis that UNRWA confronted in 1997.[77]

Israeli perceptions in regard to UNRWA and security have already been mentioned. To Israel, during the 1990s UNRWA was a body whose commitment to the refugees was problematic at times for Israeli interests, but one whose services had helped to avoid extreme reactions to Palestinian economic hardship. In general, it proved possible for Israeli governments to maintain a low-key, largely positive and constructive relationship with the agency. For the most part, and especially with the dissolution of the RAO program in the aftermath of the first intifada, the agency found its personal and professional dealings with Israeli officials reasonably cordial, at least so far as most of UNRWA's international staff members were concerned.

The Israeli approach was, however, generally unsympathetic to UNRWA's operational needs. Despite the correct and generally constructive approach taken by the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Israel was cavalier at times in regard to UNRWA's rights as a UN body, especially when Israeli security concerns were allegedly at stake. While both sides acknowledged the ongoing problems of matching their respective operational prerogatives, and made a genuine effort to address their respective needs, the fact remained that the Palestinian staff of the agency were subjected to discriminatory treatment by the Israeli authorities.

In particular, the Israeli security authorities did not accept the status of UNRWA Palestinian staff as UN employees. Those staff were routinely obliged to undergo the time-consuming procedures applied to other Palestinians seeking to cross between the West Bank or Gaza and Israel, or to

enter Jerusalem, where the UNRWA field office for the West Bank was located. Certain other restrictions were also applied to UNRWA's Palestinian staff, apparently on security grounds.

UNRWA annual reports to the UN General Assembly provided extensive accounts of the operational constraints and additional costs imposed on UNRWA by Israeli measures. They drew particular attention to the system of permits regulating the travel of Palestinian staff, checkpoint controls and searches of agency vehicles, and occasional closures of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These and other measures, UNRWA pointed out, were not always consistent with its legal status in the framework of the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, and as embodied in the 1967 Comay-Michelmore Agreement between Israel and UNRWA.[78]

Whereas some Palestinians were apt to charge UNRWA with collaborating with the "Israeli enemy," Israelis and their supporters tended to charge the agency with becoming the refugees' advocate.[79] There was little public awareness or interest in UNRWA's responsibilities as a UN agency. Resentment of the agency was reinforced by the evidence of political and other activity within training and other institutions that Israelis considered to be within UNRWA's overall responsibility, if not control. It was widely believed that the agency's facilities were used to engender or to sustain antagonism toward Israel.[80]

After 1993 as the prospects of achieving a final settlement of the refugee issue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority improved, Israel appeared to expect the agency to be phased out, or to become an instrument contributing to the integration of refugees into the socioeconomic and political framework of the West Bank and Gaza. The Beilin–Abu Mazen document, drafted in 1996, mentioned the possibility that UNRWA would be replaced by a different body capable of serving that objective. Israeli views of the future role of the agency in its other fields of operation were likely to depend upon the manner in which the refugee issue was dealt with in those countries.

By July 2000 it appeared that the Israeli approach, as apparently outlined in the negotiations with the PLO and the United States at Camp David, had shifted toward acceptance of the continuing existence of UNRWA so long as the refugee issue remained unresolved. At Taba, both sides apparently agreed that UNRWA should be phased out in accordance with an agreed timetable of five years, "as a targeted period." (The Palestinian side added that the period would be subject to the implementation of the other aspects of the agreement dealing with the refugees, and with the termination of Palestinian refugee status "in the various locations.")[81] After the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifada in September 2000, relations between Israel and UNRWA reached an all-time low, with Israel and its supporters accusing the agency of being complicit in terrorism, and UNRWA holding

Israeli Defense Forces accountable for the death of one of its international staff. The future of Israeli attitudes to the agency are difficult to predict.

To the host governments, UNRWA was a key employer and provider of core services for which they could not afford, financially or politically, to assume responsibility. No regional government would have welcomed a resolution of the refugee issue on the basis of their permanent settlement where they now resided. Nor were they attracted (with Jordan a special case because of its historical link to the West Bank) to suggestions—such as that made by Donna Arzt—of extending their citizenship to the refugees, even if refugees were willing to accept such arrangements.[82] Rightly from host governments' perspectives, and wrongly from those of Israel, UNRWA services were an important factor cushioning host governments from the full implications of their stance.

As well as being a significant United Nations agency, whose institutions paralleled many of the public-service institutions of its host countries, UNRWA was probably the largest employer outside government in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, and in the West Bank and Gaza. By virtue of those factors alone it had the capacity, in theory at least, to act virtually as a state within a state. In reality, UNRWA was careful to avoid any public discord and to minimize private dispute with the host governments among which it operated. UNRWA's primary focus was invariably the pursuit of its UN-mandated operational role.

Conclusion

UNRWA in the 1990s was a multifaceted institution. Sometimes conflicting or contradictory perceptions of the agency among refugees, donors, agency staff, and host governments presented unusual problems for policy development and changes in established approaches to program delivery. There could be no single measure of the agency's success, nor could it expect to receive coherent advice from among its various audiences concerning what its role, objectives, and performance indicators should be.

The task of defining the agency's objectives and measuring its success against them was therefore extremely complex and politically demanding. UNRWA could expect to be forever the subject of competing demands and expectations. It would, like many other UN agencies, be forced to choose between, on the one hand, the pursuit of opportunistic, essentially donor-driven approaches and, on the other hand, those strategies that it defined for itself but then had to persuade other parties to accept and support.

With such a record, it is hardly surprising that neither UNRWA, nor the UN General Assembly, nor the refugees, nor the Palestinian Authority, nor the host countries, nor the donor governments would have been much

attracted to the idea of the agency reviewing its goals. It would have been politically awkward to ask whether those goals remained as appropriate to changing political circumstances in the region as they were fifty years before. Over and above those considerations, however, was the fact that UNRWA, despite its origins, had become a symbol for the Palestinian refugees of international acceptance of responsibility for their situation. It was a concrete affirmation of the justice of their claims for redress. The blend of imagery and practical benefit provided by the agency played a substantial part—alongside family structures, collective memory, direct experience, and political factors—in preserving Palestinian refugee political mythologies.

Notes

Chapter opening epigraph is from Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 5.

1. There was hardly any substantial academic analysis published on UNRWA during the 1990s except for the excellent books by Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* and A. (Lex) Takkenberg, whose study of the international law applying to Palestinian refugees also naturally examined the role of UNRWA. See A. (Lex) Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (London: Clarendon Press, 1997). UNRWA is scarcely mentioned in the most important recent publications concerning the Palestinian nationalist movement, including Elia Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996); Glenn E. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1997). A research project being undertaken by the Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain (CERMOC), in Paris and Amman, on the refugee experience, which includes analysis of the impact of UNRWA, will improve the situation substantially. See Riccardo Bocco, Blandine Destremau, and Jean Hannoyer, eds., *Palestine, Palestiniens: Territoire national, espaces communautaires* (Amman: CERMOC, 1997). See also Jalal al-Husseini, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 2 (Winter 2000), pp. 51–64.

2. The United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR) was established by UN General Assembly Resolution 212 (III) of 19 November 1948. See endnote 5 below.

3. Robert F. Gorman, *Historical Dictionary of Refugee and Disaster Relief Organizations,* International Organizations Series no. 7 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994), p. 82. Authority for refugee protection passed from the International Refugee Organization to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in January 1951. Ibid., p. 71.

4. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV), *Assistance to Palestine Refugees,* 8 December 1949, General Assembly Official Records (GAOR), 4th sess., preambular para. 5.

5. The initial UN response took the form of the UN Disaster Relief Project (UNDRP), which was set up by the UN mediator for Palestine in July 1948 to coordinate and regularize the work initially undertaken by the American Friends Service Committee (the Quakers), the International Committees of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies, the Pontifical Mission in Palestine, as well as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the International Refugee Organization. UNDRP was replaced by UNRPR in November 1948. See Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* p. 14; Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 23–25.

6. The Economic Survey Mission was established under the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine.

7. Howard Adelman, "Palestine Refugees, Economic Integration, and Durable Solutions," in Anna C. Bramwell, ed., *Refugees in the Age of Total War* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p. 306.

8. Another UN institution with headquarters in Jerusalem that has remained in existence serving largely symbolic functions but that the Arab states are loath to see disappear, precisely because of its political symbolism, is the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), which continues to patrol in the area of the Suez Canal, and to be represented in Jordan, despite well-established peace agreements between Egypt, Jordan, and Israel.

9. UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees and UNRWA: The Long Journey,* UNRWA Headquarters Vienna, 1995, p. 7.

10. United Nations General Assembly, *Palestine: Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator,* Resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, GAOR, 3rd sess., pt. I. The mythologies surrounding Resolution 194 (III) are discussed in Chapter 4.

11. General Assembly Resolution 194 (III), Operative Paragraphs 5 and 6. Although Operative Paragraph 5 does not refer directly to the refugee issue, it calls upon "the Governments and authorities concerned . . . to seek agreement by negotiations conducted either with the Conciliation Commission or directly, with a view to the final settlement of all questions outstanding between them."

12. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* p. 24.

13. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* p. 4; Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 25–26.

14. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* p. 20. The fact that UNRWA was established specifically "to carry out in collaboration with local governments the direct relief and works programmes as recommended by the Economic Survey Mission" supports Schiff's assessment that the agency was to focus upon refugee resettlement. It may also be relevant that the UNRWA Advisory Commission was established under Resolution 302 (IV) "to advise and assist the [Commissioner-General] in the execution of the programme."

15. UNCCP, "First Interim Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East," 1949, pt. I, pp. 14, 19, cited in Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* p. 26.

16. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* p. 5.

17. Ibid., pp. 19–20.

18. Benjamin Schiff, *UNRWA's Bureaucratic Evolution, 1950–2000,* paper presented at the CERMOC fourth annual workshop on "UNRWA: A History Within History," Dead Sea, Jordan, September 1999, p. 4.

19. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* p. 274.

20. Ibid., pp. 274–275.

21. See, for example, Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI), *The Future of the Palestinian Refugee Issue in Final Status Negotiations: Palestinian Refugees—Their Past, Present, and Future,* Adel H. Yahya, project director, IPCRI Final Status Publications series, Jerusalem, March 1998, pp. 67–73.

22. UNRWA, *Harmonisation of UNRWA Services: Challenges and Progress,* discussion paper, UNRWA Headquarters Vienna, 10 April 1996, p. 10.

23. The Annual Report of the Director of UNRWA covering the period 1 July 1952 to 30 June 1953 (A/2470) said that the Advisory Commission "limits its concern to the provision of over-all guidance on Agency policy. It does not deal with the Agency's functional operations." The Advisory Commission meets annually, about September, to review the Commissioner-General's draft annual report.

24. Letter dated 28 September 1998 from the Chairman of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA. United Nations, *Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 1997–30 June 1998,* GAOR, 53rd sess., supp. 13 (A/53/13), p. x.

25. UN General Assembly Resolution 56/52 of 10 June 2001 renewed UNRWA's mandate until 30 June 2005, "without prejudice to the provisions of Paragraph 11 of its Resolution 194 (III)."

26. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* p. 251; and Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 296–301. The RAO program is described in detail in Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 291–301.

27. UN General Assembly Resolution 48/40 A, adopted 10 December 1993.

28. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 32–33.

29. In June 1999 UNRWA had 21,600 Area (Palestinian) staff posts and 109 International posts, of which 53 were in UNRWA Headquarters Gaza and 19 in UNRWA Headquarters Amman. UNRWA, *UNRWA in Figures,* UNRWA Headquarters Gaza, Public Information Office, August 1999.

30. UN GAOR A/53/13, p. 1.

31. The top eleven contributors to UNRWA in 1997 (in U.S.$ millions) were the United States 87.4, the European Union 57.5, Japan 28.6, Sweden 18.8, Norway 14.0, Denmark 13.6, the United Kingdom 10.7, the Netherlands 9.4, Germany 8.4, Switzerland 7.6, and Canada 7.6. "The 1997 UNRWA Donor Generosity Index," *FOFOGNET Digest,* 30 December 1998.

32. al-Husseini, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process," p. 51.

33. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* p. 270.

34. Ibid., p. 114.

35. Schiff, *UNRWA's Bureaucratic Evolution,* p. 5.

36. The UNHCR was established by Resolution 319 (IV) of 3 December 1949. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* p. 30.

37. World Bank, *Post-Conflict Reconstruction: The Role of the World Bank* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1998), pp. 36–38; World Bank, *Holst Peace Fund: Supporting Peace in the West Bank and Gaza* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2002), p. 2.

38. United Nations, *Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 1996–30 June 1997,* GAOR, 52nd sess., supp. 13 (A/52/13), p. 7.

39. Randa Farah, "Crossing Boundaries: Reconstruction of Palestinian Identities in Al-Baq'a Refugee Camp, Jordan," in Bocco, Destremau, and Hannoyer, *Palestine, Palestiniens,* p. 294.

40. al-Husseini, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process," p. 56.

41. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State,* p. 47. See also Fred Bruhns, "A Study of Arab Refugee Attitudes," *Middle East Journal* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1955), p. 85.

42. "Palestine Refugees Protest Cuts," *Palestine Report,* 29 August 1997, p. 6. See also Farah, "Crossing Boundaries," p. 289.

43. For details, see UNRWA website, www.un.org/unrwa/progs/ig/index.html.

44. United Nations, *Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 2000–30 June 2001,* GAOR, 56th sess., supp. 13 (A/56/13), pp. 16–20.

45. Jeni Allenby, *Portraits Without Names: Palestinian Costume* (Canberra: Palestine Costume Archive, 1996), pp. 16–17; Stephanie Latte Abdallah, "Palestinian Women in the Camps in Jordan: Interviews," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 4 (Summer 1995), p. 63.

46. See comments by Alan Baker, chief counsel of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, in Charles A. Radin, "UN Role in Palestinian Camps in Dispute—Critics Say Extremism Appeased," *Boston Globe,* 10 July 2002.

47. UNRWA dismissed allegations in March 2002 that an incursion by the Israeli Defense Forces into Balata camp near Nablus had found that UNRWA food storage areas had been allowed to become munitions depots and weapons factories. The agency pointed out that it had no food storage areas in the camp—just a health clinic, several schools, and a small camp services office—and a small UNRWA food warehouse outside the camp had not been searched during the incursion in question. It is not known whether evidence presented to UNRWA substantiates such allegations.

48. For a detailed account of the Siblin affair, see Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* pp. 105–108.

49. During the Israeli statement on UNRWA at the fifty-fifth session of the UN General Assembly, Agenda Item 84, the Israeli representative expressed appreciation for "the valuable humanitarian work" of UNRWA and called upon donor countries to continue to provide financial assistance "to this worthy cause," but said that UNRWA's efforts were "undermined by the inclusion of hostile anti-Israel propaganda contained in textbooks used by UNRWA schools. These books, which are purchased and presumably approved by UNRWA, deny Israel's right to exist and, as such, constitute a gross violation of the spirit and letter of the peace process itself." Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations, *Statement by Mr. David Zohar, Representative of Israel to the Fourth Committee on UNRWA,* 30 October 2000.

50. UNRWA, *UNRWA Gaza Fact Sheets,* UNRWA Field Office Gaza, August 1997.

51. UNRWA, "Myths and Facts About UNRWA: UNRWA School Textbooks," www.un.org/unrwa/myths/myths2.htm, 27 May 2002.

52. Farah, "Crossing Boundaries," p. 289.

53. al-Husseini, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process," pp. 53–56.

54. Amount cited by the Jordanian delegation to the informal meeting of UNRWA, donor countries and host governments, Amman, 10–11 June 1997. From unclassified correspondence released to the author by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra.

55. Crises prior to the 1990s are dealt with in some detail in Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* pp. 111–137.

56. Ibid., pp. 111–112.

57. For background on the multilateral tracks of the peace process launched at Madrid in 1991, see Joel Peters, *Building Bridges: The Arab-Israeli Multilateral Talks* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1994). See also Chapter 6.

58. UNRWA's projected budgetary needs for 1995–1999, as presented to the donor community, were based on the position that each year the agency's expenditures had to increase 5 percent to keep pace with a 3.5 percent population increase and inflation. The projections also included the cost of making the minimum necessary adjustments to area staff salaries to reflect, at least partially, pay increases to civil servants in host countries and the Palestinian Authority. UNRWA, *UNRWA and the Transitional Period: A Five-Year Perspective on the Role of the Agency and Its Financial Requirements,* discussion paper distributed to donor countries, UNRWA Headquarters Vienna, 31 January 1995, p. 9; UNRWA, *Harmonisation of UNRWA Services,* p. 8. From unclassified documents released to the author by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra.

59. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* p. 118.

60. UN GAOR A/52/13, p. 27. For a robust defense by the agency of that practice, in response to donors requesting in June 1997 that it should cease, see UNRWA, *UNRWA's Current Financial Situation and Funding Priorities for 1998: Briefing Paper Prepared for the Informal Meeting of Major Donors and Host Governments, Amman, 28 May 1998,* UNRWA Headquarters Gaza, 11 May 1998, p. 4. From unclassified documents released to the author by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra.

61. UNRWA refers to its operations in Gaza, West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan as its "field" operations.

62. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* p. 32; UNRWA, *UNRWA and the Transitional Period,* p. 1. From unclassified documents released to the author by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra.

63. Rex Brynen, *Financing Palestinian Refugee Compensation,* paper presented at the Palestinian Refugee ResearchNet and International Development Research Centre (PRRN/IDRC) workshop on "Compensation as Part of a Comprehensive Solution to the Palestinian Refugee Problem," Ottawa, 14–15 July 1999, *FOFOGNET Digest,* 6 November 1999. The estimate is based on figures from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

64. Rex Brynen, "UNRWA Funding and Global Aid," *FOFOGNET Digest,* 6 November 1999.

65. Brynen, *Financing Palestinian Refugee Compensation.* Brynen cites UNHCR document *UNHCR in Numbers* (July 1997) and UN GAOR A/52/13, p. 3.

66. Rex Brynen, *The (Very) Political Economy of the West Bank and Gaza: Learning Lessons About Peace-Building and Development Assistance,* Montreal Studies on the Contemporary Arab World (Montreal: Inter-University Consortium for Arab Studies, 1996).

67. Schiff, "UNRWA's Bureaucratic Evolution," p. 25. UN GAOR A/52/13, p. 3.

68. UNSCO, *Quarterly Report on Economic and Social Conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,* Executive Summary, 1 April 1997.

69. World Bank, *Aid Effectiveness in the West Bank and Gaza* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000), fig. 2.41.

70. IPCRI, *The Future of the Palestinian Refugee Issue,* pp. 71–73.

71. Farah, "Crossing Boundaries," p. 263.

72. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* p. 9.

73. al-Husseini, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process," p. 56.

74. Ibid., p. 55.

75. Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process,* p. 125, citing Hassan Elnajjar "Planned Emigration: The Palestinian Case," *International Migration Review* 27, no. 1 (1993), pp. 34–50.

76. For mention of Palestinian incursions into UNRWA installations and interference distribution of flour rations in 1997–1998, see UN GAOR A/53/13, p. 30. A guarded reference to the problems encountered by the agency with the Palestinian Authority and the local Palestinian political factions in Qalqilya in March 1998 in adjusting the copayment rate to make it consistent with the 25 percent copayment rate introduced earlier at all UNRWA-contracted hospitals appears in ibid., p. 3.

77. These issues are discussed in Chapter 6. For comment on Palestinian complaints that the Oslo process was nothing but a conspiracy against Palestinian national aspirations, see *The Economist,* 11 December 1999.

78. UN GAOR A/53/13, pp. 27–29.

79. Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* p. 11.

80. Michael Wines, "Killing of U.N. Aide by Israel Bares Rift with Relief Agency," *New York Times,* 4 January 2003, which quotes an Israeli official as saying: "They know nothing, they see nothing, they hear nothing . . . they have taken sides in the conflict." See also endnote 49, Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations, *Statement by Mr. David Zohar.*

81. Akiva Eldar, "'Moratinos Document': The Peace That Nearly Was at Taba," *Ha'aretz,* 14 February 2002.

82. Donna Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens: Palestinians and the End of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1996), pp. 83–86.

6

Mythologies and the Palestinian Leadership in the Oslo Period

The right of return is sacred. However, we are ready to discuss the conditions of its application.

—Yasser Arafat, quoted in *The Mideast Mirror*

Refugee mythologies are part of the mutually constituted phenomenon of Palestinian society and politics. They are not independent variables that may be altered without also altering both the experiences and narratives and the social structures that sustain them. For that reason, as this chapter will discuss, the nationalist agenda of the Palestinian leadership during the 1990s faced serious challenges.

First, Palestinian refugees—like most Palestinians—saw little change in terms of the realities of ongoing encounters with Israelis. Refugees endured the indignities of security arrangements, land confiscation for road building, and other manifestations of settlement activity that successive Israeli governments continued to permit. Israeli closures of the West Bank and Gaza following terrorist attacks perpetuated Palestinian economic insecurity. Meanwhile, refugee aspirations for just treatment in regard to their specific interests remained firmly grounded in social structures and real and imagined memories that showed little sign of changing.

Second, refugees saw the peace process proceeding in directions that were prejudicial to their perceived rights and their aspirations, including their determination to achieve, if not necessarily to exercise, the right of return to what is now Israel. Those concerns were exacerbated by the deteriorating relationship between the Palestinian political leadership and its popular audience after the mid-1990s.

It has been argued that the Palestinian refugee problem and the Palestinian struggle for self-determination are, in effect, two sides of the same coin. The fulfillment of Palestinian refugee demands can only be addressed in the context of the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state, in which the Palestinians will be free to determine their own movements and place of

abode.[1] However, Palestinian refugees perceived throughout the unfolding of the peace process during the 1990s that the Madrid process, and subsequently the Oslo process, were likely in practice to see the abandonment of their perceived rights in return for such statehood.

Refugee Issues in the Multilateral Track of the Madrid Peace Process

The multilateral track of the peace process, which followed the Madrid peace conference of 1991, was intended to create avenues toward regional cooperation that would facilitate bilateral negotiations and agreements. The bilateral talks would address the political issues of territorial withdrawal, border demarcation, security arrangements, and political rights of the Palestinians. According to Joel Peters, the multilaterals would

> provide a forum for the participants to address the range of non-political issues extending across national boundaries, the resolution of which is essential for the promotion of long-term regional development and security. Whereas the bilaterals would deal with the problems inherited from the past, the multilaterals would focus on the future shape of the Middle East.[2]

The Refugee Working Group (RWG) was established during the first round of the multilateral negotiations, held in Moscow in January 1992. With Canada as its head (or "gavel holder") the RWG held eight plenary meetings between 1992 and 1995. Plenary meetings ceased in 1997, after the Arab League called for a boycott of the multilateral negotiations in protest at the policies of the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu. Contact was maintained, however, among key participants through what were described as "intersessional" meetings and other meetings commonly known as Track Two, or second-track, activities.[3]

Although the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) succeeded in securing a focus on the refugee issue under the auspices of the multilateral talks, it was unable to include a "political" dimension in those discussions. The PLO leadership was unwilling to concede the point of principle involved, but successive Palestinian delegations to the RWG and intersessional meetings held under RWG auspices failed to overcome Israeli resistance, within that consensus-based and supposedly nonpolitical framework, to discussion of the right of return.[4] Refugee compensation, modalities of return, and resettlement were not discussed at the official level.[5]

Palestinian concerns about the way in which negotiations in the RWG focused on assistance, rather than on confronting the issues of displacement and statelessness, were heightened when the United States insisted that

Resolution 194 (III) had no place in the RWG's deliberations. Israel, too, countered Palestinian efforts to raise the issue of Resolution 194 (III) with admonishments not to "politicize" the meetings. During a round of RWG meetings in Cairo in May 1994, the head of the Canadian delegation, who was also the chair of the Working Group, had to retract a reference to the right of return as a "myth."[6]

Determined to keep the refugee issue on the multilateral framework's agenda, even if its political dimension was unable to be addressed, Palestinian delegates accepted an approach that was limited to discussion of assistance to refugees and the preparation of a range of related studies.[7] PLO representatives insisted that discussion of the conditions of the refugees in the Occupied Territories was without prejudice to final status deliberations on their political future.[8]

From the Palestinian refugee perspective, the PLO appeared to have accepted the shelving of a core element of refugee mythology—the UN resolutions dealing with the status of the refugees, particularly the right of return based on Resolution 194 (III). Although Palestinian representatives insisted on referring to Resolution 194 (III) in opening statements highlighting the right of return, the formal summary records of the discussions always diluted these as a more general reference to "relevant UN resolutions on refugees."

It was feared, accordingly, that the PLO had effectively agreed to confine the realization of refugee rights to what Israel might be willing to concede. That was seen, in effect, as forgoing the right of the refugees to a resolution of their demands on the basis of moral and legal standards accepted by the international community.[9] More specifically, the PLO was alleged to have become mired in debates with Israel over the numbers and modalities of return of those people displaced in 1967, at the expense of the principle that all refugees, by virtue of being refugees, were legally entitled to return and to be compensated. The fact that Syria and Lebanon were boycotting the multilaterals for reasons relating to the lack of progress in their bilateral negotiations with Israel inevitably opened PLO negotiators to further criticism.[10]

Refugee Perceptions of the Oslo Process, the Palestinian Authority, and UNRWA

The articulation of Palestinian identity among camp-dwelling refugees in Jordan, including the political symbolism attached to "the camp" and "refugee," as well as the right of return, was at odds with what Randa Farah has described as the "homogenizing nationalist discourse" of the Palestinian Authority. And whereas refugees believed that the Palestinian leadership had neglected the interests and rights of the refugee diaspora, UNRWA was

clearly identified with the sustaining of popular identity in opposition to threatening alternatives, including that represented by the Palestinian Authority.[11]

Farah noted that the dream of return had been "jolted" by political negotiations. The older nationalist discourse among refugees that associated return with Palestinian self-reliance, armed struggle, and liberation under the leadership of the PLO was in the process of being replaced. She found that the oral narratives of camp-dwelling refugees pointed "to an even more distant 'Return,' imagined through global events, such as the demise of the United States, religious prophecies and in some cases a faith that somehow justice will be done through History."[12]

In addition to skepticism about the value and direction of the multilateral track of the peace process, at least as far as their interests were concerned, refugees generally had deep misgivings about the Oslo process. The bottom line, so far as the right of return issue was concerned, was that the prospects of Palestinian refugees as a *distinctive interest group* in the peace process had been largely overlooked by both the Madrid and the Oslo process.

In 1948 the language and the substance of UN Resolution 194 (III), though nonbinding, had at least dealt directly with permission to return and with compensation. As discussed earlier, the Lausanne conference of 1949 had sought, albeit without success, to deal effectively with the refugee issue. By 1967, however, UN Security Council Resolution 242 merely mentioned the need to achieve "a just settlement of the refugee problem." Resolution 242 did not detail what that problem was, what a settlement might comprise, or how it might be implemented. It did not identify which categories of refugees (1948 refugees, 1967 displaced persons, or both) were to be its beneficiaries.

By 1993, even the notion of a "just settlement" referred to in Resolution 242 had taken a turn for the worse, from a refugee perspective, in the Oslo Accords. The Declaration of Principles, signed on 13 September 1993, simply recorded an "understanding" that the final status negotiations would "cover remaining issues, including: Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbours, and other issues of common interest."

Refugee interests and concerns were not given any particular status ahead of other issues, including the catchall mention of other issues of common interest. Like all issues nominated for negotiation under the Oslo framework, there was no direct linkage made between negotiations and anticipated outcomes—nor even an explicit statement that there would be outcomes on final status issues from the negotiations. There was no agreement on the principles around which outcomes on final status issues would be based. Concerned about the problems of selling the Declaration of Principles to their

respective communities, the two sides maintained a degree of ambiguity that ultimately saw each develop differing understandings of what the final outcomes would be.

Key advisers to the Palestinian side warned of the dangers to the refugee political agenda should the PLO be willing to accommodate the wider Palestinian national political agenda in that way. Elia Zureik, for example, contended that by their acceptance of the Madrid formula for the Middle East peace talks, which excluded the United Nations as the vehicle for resolving the Palestine refugee problem, the Palestinians had seriously weakened their demand for the implementation of the right of return.[13] Once the PLO had recognized the right of Israel to exist, moreover, the *exercise* by the Palestinians of the right of return would have to be undertaken in conjunction with a process of self-determination, and not within the territory of the state of Israel.[14] In that sense, therefore, the silence of the Madrid process and the Oslo Accords on the *principles* that would apply to resolving the refugee issue had effectively diluted Resolution 194 (III) as the basis for negotiations, if not ruling it out altogether.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Palestinian political thought at the leadership level had slowly evolved after 1967. From visions of redressing injustice through liberation and return—in effect seeking the establishment of an independent Palestinian state through the dismantling of Israel—it had moved to calls for a solution based on a democratic secular state accepting a Jewish society in Palestine. Such an outcome (though not a Jewish state) was seen as a fact to be addressed through reconciliation and partnership. After 1974 the PLO had adopted a new political program that identified the political objective of Palestinian nationalism as the establishment of a Palestinian state in any part of Palestine that was "liberated."[15] By the end of the 1980s the PLO had progressed to acceptance of the reality of Israel, culminating in December 1988 in the formal acceptance by the PLO of Resolution 242 and Israel's right to exist.

From the refugee perspective, however, the focus upon bilateral dealings between Israel and the PLO had the effect of diverting attention by both Yasser Arafat and the international community away from the political issue of refugees, which was eventually postponed to the final status negotiations. Also, after 1993 the Oslo process gave an incentive to donors to divert aid flows to the task of state-building in the West Bank and Gaza, rather than helping to meet the needs of refugees in the diaspora, where over 60 percent of the refugees were to be found.

Those concerns were aggravated by the Cairo Agreement of 4 May 1994, covering the Gaza Strip and Jericho area, and the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement of 28 September 1995, covering the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Those agreements established a constituency in the West Bank and Gaza to which Arafat was now formally and politically accountable.

Only those 1948 Palestinian refugees and their descendants who had the misfortune to be displaced a second time, in 1967, might have believed they stood to gain from any changes in their situation flowing from that process. The Palestinian diaspora, in general, had no reason to see the Oslo Accords as working to their advantage.

Palestinian refugees therefore overwhelmingly rejected the basis of separation that lay at the heart of the acceptance of Resolution 242 and the principle of land for peace. The creation of a Palestinian state to be located only in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was, in the words of Jalal al-Husseini, "by no means wholly accepted as a substitute for the right of return; when asked about their reluctance to accept reintegration on these parts of the Palestinian soil, and under Palestinian leadership, most refugees answer that those parts are not *their* Palestine."[16]

In short, the refugees perceived the Oslo Accords as detrimental to their legal, national, and human rights, reinforcing their sense of dispossession and disenfranchisement.[17] Amid increasing fears about their destiny, Salim Tamari observed that the refugee problem was becoming part of a dichotomy within Palestinian politics between the contingencies of state-building, on the one hand, and the demands of the diaspora for representation and repatriation, on the other. In his view,

> the return of refugees [was] dealt with not primarily as the culmination of decades of yearning for a fulfilment of dreams, but as part of a series of compromises between the absorptive capacities of the Palestinian economy and the ability of Palestinian negotiators to wrest concessions from Israeli bureaucratic and political forces opposed to refugee repatriation.[18]

Critics of the Oslo process insisted that the right of return could not be given up by any state party. It was a universal human right that the PLO should not discard in the interests of negotiating expediency. Against that point of view had to be balanced the arguments for seeking an attainable, forward-looking settlement whose elements would represent the best overall outcome achievable under the circumstances. According to that perspective, Israelis needed to be convinced, and Palestinians would have had to be persuaded to accept, that this represented a durable settlement, if not a permanent one.

Israeli and Palestinian positions were diametrically opposed on the question of responsibility for the refugee problem. Some commentators, such as Donna Arzt, suggested that the issue be avoided in favor of a forward-looking approach. But others, such as Rashid Khalidi, insisted with justification that the issue of responsibility was so central to the self-view of the Palestinian people that it had to be addressed. A symbolic response, at least, needed to be found to a real grievance that was beyond the possibility of compensation to resolve.

Despite public references to accelerating the final status negotiations on many of the key final status issues—including refugees in particular—by 1997 there was not yet a sufficient degree of consensus at the political level within either the Palestinian or the Israeli camp for meaningful negotiation on the refugee issue. The exploration of a possible agreed narrative to defuse the issue, and at the same time protect the Jewish identity of Israel from Palestinian exercise of the right of return, did not take shape until after the failure of the Camp David summit in July 2000.[19]

Just as the creation of Israel in the crucible of conflict was part of the Israeli political narrative, so too for the Palestinians was the dispossession and flight of 1948. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Palestinian leadership, let alone wider Palestinian political opinion, was not yet able in the 1990s to move beyond the issue of responsibility to explore the possibility of compromise on other, albeit related issues. Palestinian political dynamics—including the positions taken by such populist figures as Hani al-Hassan and Jamal al-Hindi—reinforced that inclination toward immobility, as well as the reluctance of the refugee population to countenance departure from familiar approaches.

Nor was there much evidence outside academic circles of willingness on the Israeli side to concede ground to the Palestinians on the political or humanitarian aspects of the issue. To do so would have required Israelis to undergo a process of collective self-criticism that would have been against current political trends. That would have been strongly resisted, and not just by opponents of the peace process.[20]

In addition to overcoming internal divisions on the substance of its negotiating objectives, there was a need for the Palestinian leadership to choose where to focus among refugees and other final status issues, and to decide in what sequence they should be addressed. Those were problematic matters for both the Palestinians and the Israelis alike. For the Palestinian leadership, the timing of focus on the refugee question was critical. It could not be too late, but it also needed to be part of a final trade-off process on a wider range of issues including Jerusalem, settlements, and borders.

By the end of the 1990s, the two leaderships had yet to make assessments of their political capacity and willingness to make such trade-offs, under various scenarios. Limited progress had been made, mostly through the Track Two efforts of academics and officials in their private capacities toward acquiring and disseminating basic data concerning both needs and demands, and in devising options for negotiators to evaluate. A strategy for development of public discourse on the refugee and other issues, however, had yet to be found.

As discussed in Chapter 4, discussion and negotiation on the issues themselves began to take a more coherent form in Stockholm ahead of the Camp David negotiations in July 2000 and at Taba, Egypt, in January

2001.[21] However, Israel and the Palestinians could not expect to resolve the refugee question bilaterally. There were regional dimensions to the refugee issue that had yet to be addressed with Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Lebanon was certain to react negatively to outcomes that failed to address the refugee issue in accordance with its perceived national interests.

In the case of Syria, although the refugee issue had not been raised as a bilateral matter between the two sides, the Syrians were unlikely to acquiesce readily to any Israeli-Palestinian deal if that complicated still further the achievement of a return to Syria of the Golan. Regionwide agreements over water and economic empowerment for the Palestinians (including labor mobility, trade and investment, and security arrangements) would also affect the capacity of the Palestinian state to absorb returnees.

At the popular level, some studies suggested that, similar to the Israelis, there was growing willingness among Palestinians to differentiate between a felt need to adhere firmly to long-held beliefs, on the one hand, and for flexibility and compromise in the pursuit of political objectives, on the other. Research by Sara Roy in Gaza during 1988, for example, indicated the emergence of a new political paradigm among the Palestinian community, characterized by a desire for political compromise with Israel, based on a dilution of the Palestinian claim to all of Palestine.

Roy found that the overwhelming majority of her respondents acknowledged that any notion of reclaiming their original homes now inside Israel had to be abandoned if a political resolution to the conflict was to be achieved.[22] In Gaza, the reasons for this approach included prolonged deprivation and suffering, and threats to the family unit and societal cohesion. Roy found widespread fears for the future of Palestinian children; a reassessment of internal power relations between Palestinians and Israelis and the subsequent unworkability of historical approaches to the Palestinian state; loss of faith in the Arab states to act on their behalf; acute psychic stress; and a desperate need for self-determination on part of historical Palestine.[23] Roy's analysis concluded that by renouncing the exclusivity of their claim to homes inside Israel, Palestinian refugees in Gaza had accepted the legitimacy of Israel, albeit as an enemy state. For Gazan refugees the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was "no longer viewed as a zero-sum game, but as a negotiable dispute."[24]

Amira Hass made a similar assessment that, while the Palestinians would not renounce their longing to return to what was once their land, they were capable of separating that wish from the need for a political solution.[25] Occasional press reports were also made to that effect, though perhaps without the benefit of serious research.[26]

In contrast to those findings, however, was evidence that as the decade went on, attitudes were hardening against compromise in general, especially among the younger generation of Palestinian refugees. So far as the

right of return was concerned, the notion of returning to somewhere other than pre-1967 Israel generally attracted a strong negative reaction among younger refugees. According to a survey in 1995,

> [f]ully 66 per cent of those who were born after 1967 opposed forfeiting the 1948 lands for an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital, compared to 55 per cent of those who were born before 1967. . . . Those between fifteen and eighteen years of age expressed the greatest opposition to relinquishing claims to the 1948 lands. Around 70 per cent opposed the proposition, 26 per cent approved it, and the remaining 4 per cent had no opinion on the subject.[27]

A survey undertaken by the Israel-Palestinian Centre for Research and Information (IPCRI) in 1998 found that 107 of 116 interviewees (92.2 percent) insisted that granting refugees the right of return to their original homes was the only way of meeting their expectations. When refugees were asked if compensation, resettlement, and rehabilitation would solve the refugee problem if implemented, 66 out of 83 interviewees (79.5 percent) said no. Asked if compensation, rehabilitation, and resettlement in an independent Palestinian state, including the return of refugees from abroad, was seen as a just solution, 59.8 percent of interviewees rejected that approach, only 13.6 percent supported it, and 22.1 percent were unsure.[28] A separate survey in 1997, among 1,200 West Bank refugees living in refugee camps, found that when asked what a just solution to the refugee problem was perceived by them to mean, 74.9 percent said return, only 15.6 percent said compensation, and 6 percent said return and compensation.[29]

The Palestinian Authority and Palestinian Politics After 1993

With the establishment of U.S. and Israeli acceptance of the PLO as a legitimate international political actor in its own right after the Palestinian acceptance of Resolution 242 in 1988, and certainly after the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian leadership faced the prospect of having to revise its patterns of political behavior even further. To be consistent, at least, with the basis upon which it reached agreement with Israel to bring a peaceful end to their conflict, the Palestinian leadership was under an obligation to end its reliance upon the imagery of armed struggle and to concentrate upon state-building.

A fundamental problem for Yasser Arafat, however, was that the building of a peace with Israel would as a matter of practical necessity be based upon the irrevocable compromising of Palestinian political aspirations,

long-standing political mythologies, and collective memories. His formal acceptance since 1988 of the framework of a peace settlement based on acceptance of the legitimacy, sovereignty, and security of Israel as a Jewish state demanded nothing less. And yet Arafat was under pressure, from his domestic audience at least, to support the same basic positions and goals that applied before the political circumstances of the Palestinians had changed so significantly after 1993.

The Palestinian Authority had little to offer as a substitute for the founding myths of the PLO as a result of its engagement with Israel under the Oslo framework. It also had to bear the political costs associated with the shortcomings of its economic, political, and social performance. Writing in 1999, respected Palestinian academics Yezid Sayigh and Khalil Shikaki noted that it was imperative for the Palestinian Authority, in its own interests, "to address the flaws and gaps in its institution-building and to strive constantly for improved performance and more effective and accountable governance [and] to see and acknowledge its own shortcomings and to take ownership of the reform process by leading it."[30]

The peace process—as a general concept—continued to enjoy a large measure of popular Palestinian support, with polls suggesting endorsement by about 70 percent of the Palestinian population.[31] However, at the popular level the required outcomes of the process remained the established demands for return, redress, statehood with Jerusalem as its capital, and an end to Israeli occupation and Jewish settlements. There was no suggestion from Arafat that a morally defensible approach could be based on acceptance of anything less than those demands.

Meanwhile, Arafat had set about the political task of effecting control over a society he did not fully trust. The PLO leadership generally operated quite effectively, through mixtures of persuasion, backed at times by coercion and selective cooperation, in minimizing the potential threats from other centers of influence and ideological rivals. Political control remained reasonably secure in Arafat's hands, and the elite surrounding him had an ongoing interest in maintaining the system.[32] Arafat's centralizing strategy threatened the interests of a range of parties on the Palestinian side. But traditional patterns of authoritarian political behavior and factional tendencies prevailed as he dealt with dissent and alternative political entities, including those to be found within the refugee camps.

The emergence of the Palestinian Authority affected Palestinians in different ways. For individuals affiliated with the Palestinian Authority mainstream, there was a prospect of standing to benefit from the patrimonial orientation of Arafat and, in a few cases, associated opportunities for corruption and extortion.[33] Some elements of the local leadership who had emerged during the intifada, but who remained outside Arafat's favor, stood to lose as the process of state-building along centralized lines began to gather momentum.

There was, however, no serious challenge to Arafat's leadership, despite bitterness in some quarters toward the benefits acquired by the Palestinian "outsiders" arriving from Tunisia and elsewhere. Nor was there reason to expect a significantly different approach among Arafat's potential successors. Power in Palestinian politics continued—as it had done for decades—to revolve around Arafat's leadership.

The political base Arafat proceeded to build had four pillars: the security forces, a patronage network of new Palestinian Authority bureaucrats, members of the old notable social class, and his own Fatah cadres (except those too independent to control adequately). A strategy of fragmenting the nontraditional elite was adopted. Some were co-opted into positions of authority, others were intimidated, and most were marginalized by being prevented by the Palestinian Authority from actively participating in the political process.[34]

Fatah continued in an uneasy but generally workable relationship with its traditional secular predecessors and remained dominant despite its relatively conservative political image. Though often critical of Arafat—who Palestinians popularly believed visited the White House more often than refugee camps—and frequently at loggerheads with the Palestinian Authority security services, in 1996–1997 Arafat's Fatah organization nevertheless could generally be relied upon by him for support when challenged by Islamist and leftist nationalist groups.

Key activists grew attached to the privileges and the perks of their position that proximity to power invited.[35] Highly detailed reports by the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)'s Monitoring Committee of executive authority graft, nepotism, and mismanagement, including the identification of ministers involved in activities ranging from kickbacks for protecting monopolies to the granting of customs exemptions for the import of luxury cars, were ignored by Arafat. Instead of dismissing the ministers charged with corruption, Arafat reconstituted his cabinet, retaining the ministers concerned, and received a vote of confidence from the PLC for the new body.[36]

There was little evidence of alternative power structures emerging, or of coherent and effective opposition to Arafat's policy directions. Irrespective of whether the peace process was going forward or likely to remain in limbo, Palestinians appeared to be consolidating a stable, postrevolutionary elite who insisted on a Palestinian state, who preferred peace and economic development, and who would fight against a militant Islamic takeover or any external Arab threat. When Israel was ready for a compromise peace, it appeared there was likely to be a Palestinian leadership beyond Arafat ready to make such a deal.[37]

In the 1970s and 1980s, in Yezid Sayigh's words, armed struggle had eventually turned the Palestinian "idea" into an organized mass phenomenon, by offering a powerful symbol of the imagined community and providing the

impetus to focus it on a common structure.[38] Beyond the era of the first intifada, the limited practical and political utility of armed struggle against the Israeli occupation became increasingly obvious, and its costs for the vast majority of Palestinians—as well as for the Palestinian Authority—were considered unacceptable. Armed struggle as a strategic option was therefore largely eschewed, especially within the secular side of the Palestinian political spectrum, at least until the collapse of the Oslo process at the end of 2000.

Both Arafat and his secular critics—who in most cases took care to remain within the political playing field—gained from the neopatrimonial system. Although there were interests-based clashes from time to time—such as over the corruption and monopolistic practices of the Palestinian Authority and individuals close to Arafat such as Mohammed Rashid (also known as Khalid Salaam) and the Palestinian parent company known as Al-Bahar[39]—for most of the decade there were few who stood to gain by challenging directly the overall basis on which the system operated.

Neopatrimonial practices were not incompatible with the advocacy of central elements of Palestinian mythology, nor with the pursuit of particular political objectives in regard to Israel. Indeed the system drew heavily upon the business connections established between Arafat and those around him with prominent figures in the Israeli security establishment, such as Yossi Ginossar, a former Shabak senior official who worked alongside Mohammed Rashid as an Israeli liaison point.[40]

Overall, the system demonstrated a high level of capacity to maintain apparently contradictory stances between competing elites in reasonably functional, if usually far from harmonious, equilibrium. An appearance of responsiveness to popular mythology operated in conjunction with a decisionmaking process on issues of resource allocation that was more likely to be driven primarily on a day-to-day basis by the pragmatic concerns of the neopatrimonial system. The political mechanisms that developed in the Palestinian context were essentially constructed around, and were therefore likely to reinforce, presumptions that no party would seek irrevocably to exclude the other from the benefits, including the material benefits, that flowed from the possession of power—provided, of course, that they did not bring differences to the point of outright confrontation.

All disputes, and indeed all decisions, were presumed to be negotiable. And it was assumed that negotiation was more likely to achieve outcomes that all sides could tolerate than any outcome that might have been achieved through attempts at coercion. Key to the stability of that approach, however, was the continuation of access across a fairly wide spectrum of the political and bureaucratic elite to the material benefits that it offered.

There was abundant evidence across the Palestinian nationalist movement of ideological factionalism, intellectual eclecticism, and political fragmentation. In part, this was the result of geographic separation, including between dispersed refugee populations, and the adoption of strategies of survival based on individual or family needs, rather than national community or class needs, to cope with the political and other demands and pressures of Arab host societies. In part it was a result of intellectual differences concerning the desirable direction or even the tactics of Palestinian political activity.

Whatever the underlying reasons, however, the net effect of the historical and institutional context of the Palestinian struggle during the 1990s was to underline a lack of genuine ideological depth and cohesion among the major Palestinian political organizations. At the elite level of political activism, the collective memories of dispossession and of struggle in the years of the intifada provided a measure of common ground between the parties. But there was no device to convert contests for power over the allocation of resources, in the course of which references to refugee mythology continued to be drawn upon as a political weapon, into a forward-looking framework that would be capable of nation building.

That approach did not therefore provide, ultimately, a comprehensive or sound basis for dealing with the political challenges posed by accommodation to the peace process based on the Oslo Accords. As previously discussed, the traumas recounted in the Palestinian political mythology and collective memory of historical injustice and suffering—all too often reinforced by direct personal experience—continued to provide a potent source of shared beliefs and values. Nor could Arafat ignore the political opinion of his wider Palestinian audience, for whom traditional political mythologies provided comfort and a degree of reassurance. The focus on historical injustice and the deficiencies of contemporary Palestinian political life under the Palestinian Authority encouraged popular rejection of the unpalatable, rather than the mobilization of Palestinian political opinion for the exploration of new approaches.

Arafat and the Palestinian Opposition

Throughout the 1990s the Palestinian leftist and Islamist opposition was largely unable to find an effective political response to the reality that there was now an effective buffer—in the form of the Palestinian Authority and its security apparatus—between the Palestinian population and the Israelis. Nor did it have an answer to the fact that the Palestinian Authority was exercising its autonomous power to secure its domestic control, or at least

to silence criticism within its limited domain. At the same time, the limited effectiveness of opposition voices, mass arrests, and the workings of the Palestinian State Security Court widened the gap between the Palestinian leadership and its mass audience.[41]

Two events provide important insights into the assertion of control by Arafat and the growing alienation between the Palestinian Authority and its popular audience after 1994. The first was the violence with which, in November 1994, the Palestinian Authority police quelled a demonstration in Gaza by Islamic Jihad and Hamas activists following the assassination, probably by Israeli security and Palestinian collaborators, of the Islamic Jihad terrorist Hani Aabed and the suicide attack on Israeli soldiers that followed.

After disturbances began with Aabed's funeral (during which Arafat was ejected from the Al-Omari mosque by Aabed's supporters), Palestinian police intervened to prevent a procession in memory of the suicide bomber. Losing control of the situation, the police began firing into the crowd who had gathered for the procession at the Falastin mosque, killing thirteen people. It was never made clear whether the order to fire had come from Arafat or was the result of inexperience and fear on the part of the police. Whether the killings were intentional or not, the message they conveyed was that Arafat's regime was determined to draw unequivocal limits to opposition and to eliminate anyone posing a serious threat to its authority.[42]

Another instructive incident was Arafat's alleged refusal to pay compensation to the families of the fifty-nine Palestinians who lost their lives in the rioting that followed the reopening by the Netanyahu government, in September 1996, of the Hasmonean tunnel beside the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem.[43] According to Palestinians in Gaza, since the rioting in Gaza had not been endorsed prior to the event by Arafat (although he quickly embraced it after it broke out), it represented a challenge to his authority. For the first time in recent memory, even families generally supportive of Arafat and Fatah were unable to obtain from Arafat the financial benefits usually provided to the immediate relatives of "martyrs."[44]

Though Islamic and secular competing alternatives to Fatah displayed superior organizational skills at times—especially in refugee camps—the Islamic opposition, for its part, had proven to have appeal only when the direct target was Israel. And its terrorist actions had to be balanced, in practice if not in theory, against the political costs arising from the effects of closures upon ordinary Gazans.[45] Attempts to build a national-Islamist bloc were frustrated by organizational wrangling and incompatibility of political aims. Hamas, for its part, remained ambivalent about the fate of the PLO and the possibility of peaceful coexistence with Israel. It was unable to negotiate terms to operate formally under the Palestinian Authority's umbrella.

Arafat's secular critics also did not, in most cases, wish to be accused of departing from political orthodoxy where mythology was concerned.

Their main lines of attack upon Arafat and the Palestinian Authority were, after all, that Arafat could not be trusted to be politically orthodox enough, that he was too determined to exert control, and that he was too parsimonious in his dealings with those who did not enjoy his favor. Secular opposition political agendas, instead of responding directly to the implications of the Oslo framework for the future direction of the political struggle, therefore related mainly to reform of the PLO and criticism of Arafat's leadership. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) were unable to resist the political realities arising from self-rule. Opposition politics generally were "marked by theoretical poverty and organisational paralysis."[46]

On policy issues, the leftist and other groups that made political headway during the intifada in the refugee camps, and that were later subjected to a process of recentralization of power upon the PLO leadership, had little incentive to accommodate the nationalist political agenda advanced by the Palestinian Authority under Arafat. They made no effort to do so. Where the nationalist agenda was perceived to put refugee demands and interests at risk, the leftist groups had a strong incentive to position themselves, like Fatah, in ways that allowed continued capacity to criticize, without however excluding the possibility of potentially rewarding patrimonial relations with the Palestinian Authority leadership. The Palestinian Authority, for its part, continued to pursue its centralizing course, but without allowing tensions arising from that process to reach a point where new approaches would have to be found.

No coherent alternative to the direction of Arafat's policies was evident among opposition circles. Figures from the nongovernmental organization (NGO) movement such as Mustapha Barghouti argued that the Palestinian Authority remained under the direction of Israel both politically and economically. He insisted that "real commitment" to peace necessitated ignoring the Oslo and Cairo Agreements and building "an unshakeable front on the basis of the Palestinian national aims."[47] Writing in 1995, Graham Usher summed up the situation in 1994 as follows:

> Even more culpably, the PLO opposition had yet to formulate a coherent political programme outlining its positions vis-a-vis the Palestinian self-government. When pressed to construct a positive political alternative to Oslo, the opposition's line was that "it is not our job to create a new alternative, but to guard the original agenda of the PLO, which the PLO relinquished in the agreement."[48]

There was little evidence to suggest significant change in that situation over the following few years. The intensity of Palestinian political life did not moderate, nor was there a tendency toward convergence among competing alternatives. Arafat was prepared to use Fatah's predominance for

political ends, although he enjoyed less than complete success in imposing his will where the Islamic movement enjoyed independent access to funding, including from the Gulf states. Arafat found it difficult, for example, to starve the Islamist-dominated institutions such as the Islamic University in Gaza and Al-Maqasid charitable hospital in Jerusalem of funds.

By regional standards, however, Palestinian politics remained remarkably free from the use of force to repress internal opposition. There were well-understood limits to the conduct of political behavior, both in regard to other factions and in regard to dealings with the central authority. But the Palestinian movement had to pay a price for that outcome in terms of bureaucratic weakness, corruption, and political and ideological aimlessness.

The Situation at the End of the 1990s

By the end of the decade there was an inevitable tension between refugee mythology and the orientation of those Palestinians around Arafat—and, for that matter, those Israelis—who, for whatever reason, had become committed to establishing peace based on compromise. It remained to be seen what priority would be accorded to the refugee issue in the Palestinian nationalist political agenda if refugee aspirations should have to be balanced against the attainment or consolidation of other political outcomes at the national level.

While closely related to each other and often overlapping, Palestinian national objectives as represented by the leadership of the Palestinian Authority, and the political agendas and the mythologies of Palestinian refugees, had separate dynamics. They would not necessarily be coterminous. Indeed there was a strong likelihood that the areas of commonality between refugee aspirations and the nationalist Palestinian political agenda would exist in practice only up to the point where the limit of the politically possible was reached, in terms of national Palestinian political objectives.

The more the peace process witnessed significant reversals after 1995, the more difficult it was for the Palestinian nationalist movement to find more powerful yet relevant symbols than those that had applied before Oslo, including those that had underpinned the imagery of armed struggle. The message that was clear to the Palestinian political audience, including refugees, about Israel under the Likud government from 1996 to 1999 was that their aspirations were at constant risk of being degraded.

Unilateral measures taken on the Israeli side in regard to such matters as settlement activity, including in and around Jerusalem, were deeply damaging to the prospects of achieving peace. The number of settlers in the West Bank almost doubled—to 200,000—during the period from 1993 to 2000. Periodic closures of the Green Line and occasional internal closures

within the West Bank itself deprived the Palestinians of the economic benefits of peace. The confiscation of Jerusalem identification cards, house demolitions, and failure to secure the release of substantial numbers of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons affected hundreds of families directly and rendered them even more economically vulnerable. The involvement of former Israeli security officials and agents of the Palestinian Authority including intelligence officers, policemen, and "advisers" working on their own behalf and on behalf of Arafat were widely seen as an indictment of the political processes at work between the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships.[49] Those concerns were freely drawn upon by critics and opponents of the peace process, and by rival parties to the Palestinian Authority in ongoing exchanges of claims and counterclaims.[50]

Israeli treatment of the return issue as nonnegotiable was rejected by the Palestinians, quite understandably, as a strategy of psychological intimidation and as a violation of the spirit if not of the technical content of the Oslo Accords.[51] The idea of compromise on the issue of return encountered strong and vocal resistance, even though it was alleged to be more or less accepted by a number of leading figures within the Palestinian political elite, such as Nabil Shaath and Faisal Husseini. Ziad Abu Zayyad, a prominent member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, was strongly criticized when he called for a distinction to be drawn between, on the one hand, the "right of return" as a principle and, on the other hand, "exercising that right by literally returning to Palestine as a national homeland and to that same home."[52]

Arafat's private position on the question of return was widely assumed to involve willingness to compromise on the implementation of the principle, although in public he insisted that the right itself was sacrosanct. In 1990 he had stated that the solution of the issue lay in mutual recognition and the commencement of negotiations. Whereas the right of return was "sacred," Arafat said, he was ready "to discuss the conditions of its application."[53] That tension—together with the underlying popular concerns described by Randa Farah—was a constant background factor in the debate that unfolded in 1997 between the Palestinian Authority, the refugees, and the international donor community over the financial crisis encountered by UNRWA (discussed in Chapter 7).

Though important parts of an overall equation, refugees and UNRWA itself were not regarded consistently among key players as vital to the interests of the peace process negotiations. As the proposed compromise on the right of return outlined in the Beilin–Abu Mazen document revealed, negotiators in the peace process appeared focused on the achievable, rather than on, or perhaps at the short-term expense of, the morally demanding but less than compelling case for early attention to the refugee issue.

Amid the hardheaded sophistication prevailing at the leadership level, however, there was an even more significant failure on the part of the

Palestinian political leadership to deal with perhaps the most fundamental political fact in regard to the refugees. The Palestinian elite failed to acknowledge the depth and intensity of resistance among Palestinian political audiences, in particular the refugees, to abandoning or modifying the mythologies that they had sustained, and that had sustained them, over the preceding five decades. And whereas the Palestinian leadership was disinclined to build awareness among refugees of limits to what could be considered politically realistic, there was no shortage of Palestinian political figures anxious to remind their audiences of their commitment to supporting refugee aspirations. Those figures sought, moreover, to underline the abstract commitments embodied in UN resolutions dealing with the refugee issue, without producing a strategy through which to bring about the concrete realization of such principles.[54]

An interview with Jamal Shati al-Hindi, PLC member and chairman of the PLC's Refugee and Diaspora Committee, in March 1998 illustrates this point. An interviewer pointed out that Yossi Sarid, Shulamit Aloni, and other prominent members of the Israeli Left, who were clearly sympathetic to the Palestinian nationalist case, refused nevertheless to accept the return of refugees to their 1948 homes in Israel. The interviewer suggested to al-Hindi that allowing the right of return within the peace process would be likely therefore to "wreck the whole exercise."

In response, al-Hindi insisted that return was a right of the Palestinian people for 2,000 years. ("They lived in their land and lived in their homes. Why shouldn't they return to their homes? . . . The UN allowed Israel membership [of the UN] so that it could fulfill 194 and Israel can't take this away.") The interview continued as follows:

> *al-Hindi:* It may take much time for us to return to our homes. We want to live in our villages.
>
> *Q.:* So there can't be peace without this?
>
> *al-Hindi:* Maybe there will be peace if the Palestinians get the right of return.
>
> *Q.:* And if they don't?
>
> *al-Hindi:* Then there won't. There are four million Palestinian refugees who want to return.
>
> *Q.:* Israelis may say that they are willing to have a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza but only if the Palestinians give up on the right of return of the refugees to Israel. Don't give up on the right of return and the negotiations fall apart. Are you ready to have the negotiations fail just because of the right of return?
>
> *al-Hindi:* Israel didn't give us houses in Israel. They are Palestinian houses. Why can't we return to our homes. Would the Jews agree to the Arabs getting their homes?
>
> *Q.:* I am asking a practical question. If there is a way for you to get now a Palestinian state it is at the price of giving up on the right of return. Are you willing to pay this price?

al-Hindi: No. I won't agree to this. Nor will all the Palestinian refugees.[55]

Tanzim and the Breakdown of the Oslo Process

Despite growing popular misgivings about the Oslo process, for much of the latter half of the 1990s it appeared virtually inconceivable, unless there were an actual degeneration of the Israeli-Palestinian situation into intense and sustained armed conflict, that the Palestinians would ultimately be denied a sovereign state. For the Palestinians to attempt recourse to sustained violence would have been a futile and potentially unmanageable move that would have set back, perhaps indefinitely, the prospects for fulfilling even minimal Palestinian political demands. The consequences of conflict would have been felt by Israel, but would not have been seen among Israelis as a more existential threat than the dangers posed by succumbing to such pressure.

Logically, therefore, it was key to the interests of Arafat and those around him to avoid placing at risk the short-term gains extracted from both Israel and the Western countries through the Oslo process. It was in their interests to align Palestinian priorities as far as possible with the interests of the United States in seeing an end to the conflict through the emergence of a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel. There was an overriding need to show some gains, and to avoid confrontation developing at the expense of the political standing of the pro-peace camp in Israel, or the Palestinian Authority leadership's credibility with its Palestinian audience, or with the U.S. administration of the day in Washington.

The reasons for Arafat's failure to protect those core interests are complex.[56] Though some of the relevant factors have been mentioned elsewhere, adequate investigation of the issue is beyond the scope of this book.[57] However, no review of the 1990s can be completed without briefly mentioning the tragedy that overtook Palestinians and Israelis at the end of the decade.

It has already been described how middle-class Palestinian activists had emerged during the 1980s, seeking to modernize and mobilize Palestinian society. They were grounded in the student movements of the Palestinian universities, frequently having shared experience of time spent in Israeli prisons.

From 1994 onward, as the underground political organizations of the past disintegrated, some such as former youth leaders Mohammed Dahlan and Abu Ali Shaheen were willing to be part of the new order in the Gaza and the West Bank, respectively. Other prominent local personalities, such as Hussam Khader in Nablus, mostly remained outside Arafat's political embrace without necessarily having an oppositional relationship with him.

Still others—including the key operatives in the organizations perpetrating terrorist attacks against Israelis in the late 1990s and from 2000 onward—were destined to have an ambiguous, often insecure relationship with the Palestinian Authority and senior figures heading its security agencies.[58]

Many of Fatah's supporters in the West Bank and Gaza who were active during the intifada, but who had been unable since that time to share in the neopatrimonial spoils of the Palestinian Authority, also became members of a group known as Tanzim. Under the leadership (in Ramallah but not in other parts of the West Bank such as Hebron and Nablus) of Fatah's secretary-general, Marwan Barghouti, Tanzim sought, from within Fatah, to present itself as an effective counterweight to genuine and supposed abuses of power by various elements of the security forces of the Palestinian Authority. Barghouti was actively embroiled in a major confrontation with the Palestinian Authority security forces in October 1998 as a result of a power struggle between the Palestinian Authority and Fatah in which a range of factors—including *hamula*-based allegiances and refugee versus nonrefugee tensions—were involved.[59]

Despite its involvement in struggles for political turf, Tanzim initially lacked policy impact, at least so far as Arafat's approach to the peace process was concerned. Tanzim's political role became more pronounced, however, as popular disenchantment with the Oslo process and with the Palestinian Authority took firm hold after 1998. Tanzim played a leading part in unrest during May 2000 over the nonrelease of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. Marwan Barghouti then achieved widespread international media attention as a driving force behind the sustained disturbances that broke out between the Palestinians and Israel in October 2000.[60] More comfortable reacting to developments than seeking to shape them, and too ambiguous in his commitment to upholding the political basis for the Oslo process despite its frustrations and delays, Arafat allowed Barghouti to seize the political opportunity presented by Ariel Sharon's domestic election-oriented visit to the Temple Mount. He failed to act decisively to prevent the worsening violence that Barghouti deliberately promoted in its aftermath.[61]

The more the Palestinian uprising assumed the character of a full-scale guerrilla war and drew in elements of the Palestinian security forces, the more the initiative in the conflict passed from Arafat and the Palestinian Authority to the refugee camp-based militias, such as Tanzim, the Al-Aqsa brigades linked to Fatah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad.[62] Israeli responses humiliated potentially constructive Palestinian players, including Mohammed Dahlan, and weakened their willingness and capacity to impose discipline within their own ranks and beyond.

Amid a cycle of blows and counterblows, terrorism against Israelis, mounting carnage, and armed clashes between Israelis and Palestinians

finally destroyed what remained of the Oslo process. Neither side had a monopoly on virtue or villainy as that process unfolded. Both sides have been left with little but the shadow of an uncertain future to contemplate.

The most vital ingredient of the Oslo process was never its formal commitments from either side to the other, although those commitments should have been more precise and should have been honored in spirit as well as in substance. The United States should have played a more active part in seeing that the parties did so. But the key strength of Oslo was the opportunity it provided to develop a political relationship based on good faith and predictability of behavior, backed by a commitment on the part of the United States to seeing a durable outcome within a finite period.

It was always evident that the Oslo process would need careful management if it were to secure such an outcome. Like a tightrope walker, keeping a degree of forward momentum was the surest means of keeping its shortcomings and ambiguities under control. It proved impossible, however, to sustain the balance between the positive and negative qualities of the Oslo approach when political leadership was tested and found wanting in both style and substance in the crisis of late 2000.

Conclusion

Individually and collectively, Palestinian refugees faced growing economic and political pressure during the 1990s. There were strong recollections of the collective spirit of resistance, which gave birth to the intifada. Ominously, however, there was also increasing skepticism about the political orientation, commitment, and capabilities of the Palestinian Authority under Arafat's leadership. There was a remarkable contrast between Zionist experience with the manipulation of mythology for nation-building purposes, on the one hand, and the performance of the Palestinian Authority under Yasser Arafat, on the other.

In the latter instance, as Helmreich's analysis of stress and peer group influence suggests was likely to be the case, a traumatized refugee population sought reassurance from adherence to the established values and symbols of peer reference groups embodied in folk mythologies, rather than from adherence to the stance of a high-status leadership.[63] And traditional political sentiment among those groups was bound to have stronger appeal than programs emerging from the scholarly mythologies of political leaders that, whether explicitly or otherwise, were perceived to be based upon acceptance of compromise and change.

All key parties on the Palestinian side were operating within a political playing field shaped, at the elite level, by considerations of neopatrimonialism and, at the popular level, by competing demands for adherence to the

core elements of refugee political mythology. With an ever-present backdrop of coercive behavior at the grassroots level on the part of the Palestinian Authority toward its critics and opponents, the political balance between Arafat and his critics was sustainable. It was also evident, however, that the tensions between popular mythologies and Arafat's nationalist agenda would need careful management if the peace process were to move forward. As will be discussed in the next chapter, that situation heightened Arafat's sensitivity to any suggestion that the financial crisis in UNRWA in 1997 was linked to outcomes supposedly intended for the peace process. Arafat not only had to relate to such concerns, but it was also essential for him to contain them.

There were tensions arising from the need to weigh issues of principle and ideological commitment among Palestinians in general and Palestinian refugees in particular against, at leadership levels, a focus on the realizable and the practical. Forces for political mobilization at the popular level were strengthened by frustration with the limited achievements of the peace process. Critics of the Oslo process were determined to resist further encroachment upon their autonomy and political prerogatives by the Palestinian Authority. Concerns on the part of the Palestinian Authority for statebuilding had to be tempered by its understanding of the limits to the politically possible among the Palestinian community in the West Bank and Gaza.

The Palestinian Authority leadership was already suffering from suspicion among the refugee community that it was prepared, under pressure from Israel and the United States, to accept the irrevocable compromising of refugee political aspirations central to their political mythologies and collective memories. The Palestinian Authority was also perceived among refugees to lack key qualities of authenticity and legitimacy. The Palestinian leadership strengthened its capacity to preserve itself, but it did so without building a level of political authority that would have helped it to meet its own obligations under the Oslo framework, even when Israel for its part was seen as having failed to do so.

In effect, a relatively stable political situation came at the expense of the capacity of Arafat to lead the wider Palestinian refugee public, who mostly lacked access to the fruits of his neopatrimonial behavior, when the political task became harder. The refugee audience was not prepared to see political concessions or change, or to accept central direction, without a great deal of consultation, debate, and bargaining. Change apparently brought about through external intervention, including change that would impose added financial burdens upon the refugee population relying upon UNRWA services, was bound to encounter stiff resistance. And concern regarding the likely consequences of change for the mythologies to which the refugees were firmly attached was likely to be firmly and vocally expressed.

Notes

Chapter-opening epigraph is quoted from *Mideast Mirror,* 26 February 1990, cited in Andrew Gowers and Tony Walker, *Behind the Myth: Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Revolution* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1992), p. 356. Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir dismissed the statement.

1. A. (Lex) Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (London: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 351. That approach is also advocated by Mark A. Heller and Sari Nusseibeh in their visionary work *No Trumpets, No Drums: A Two-State Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991).

2. Joel Peters, *Building Bridges: The Arab-Israeli Multilateral Talks* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1994), p. 3.

3. Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), *The Palestinian Refugees Fact File,* PLO Department of Refugee Affairs, Ramallah and Jerusalem, April 2000, p. 20.

4. Elia Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996), pp. 92–93.

5. Ibid., p. 89.

6. Elia Zureik, "Palestinian Refugees and Peace," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1994), pp. 13–14.

7. Eight main themes were identified, each with a lead country or "shepherd." The themes, and respective shepherds, were databases (Norway), family reunification (France), human resources development (United States), job creation (United States), public health (Italy), child welfare (Sweden), economic and social infrastructure (European Union), and after 1995, "human dimension" (Switzerland). PLO, *The Palestinian Refugees Fact File,* p. 20.

8. Salim Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations: From Madrid to Oslo II* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996), p. 7.

9. Graham Usher, "Oslo's Harvest," *Al-Ahram Weekly,* 17 September 1998; Marie-Louise Weighill, *Palestinian Refuges in Lebanon: The Politics of Assistance,* paper presented at the Palestinians in Lebanon Conference organized by the Centre for Lebanese Studies and the Refugees Studies Programme, Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University, 27–30 September 1996; p. 45. For a more recent reaffirmation of that view, see BADIL Resource Centre, *A Palestinian State Cannot Replace the Refugees' Right of Return! Call for Protection of Palestinian Refugee Rights,* 26 April 1999, *FOFOGNET Digest,* 27 April 1999.

10. There were supposedly six regional parties to the negotiations (Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinians, and Syria), but Syria and Lebanon maintained a boycott on the entire multilateral process from the outset.

11. Randa Farah, "Crossing Boundaries: Reconstruction of Palestinian Identities in Al-Baq'a Refugee Camp, Jordan," in Riccardo Bocco, Blandine Destremau, and Jean Hannoyer, eds., *Palestine, Palestiniens: Territoire national, espaces communautaires* (Amman: Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain [CERMOC], 1997), pp. 262–263.

12. Ibid., p. 263. Such millenarian notions are not unknown elsewhere, including in the United States. See "Lexington Behold the Rapture," *The Economist,* 24 August 2002.

13. Zureik, "Palestinian Refugees and Peace," pp. 16–17.

14. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law,* pp. 238–240.

15. Muhammad Hallaj, "The Challenge of Life," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2, no. 1 (1989), pp. 16–17.

16. Jalal al-Husseini, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 2 (Winter 2000), p. 60.

17. Clovis Maksoud, "Peace Process or Puppet Show?" *Foreign Policy,* no. 100 (Fall 1995), pp. 117, 120.

18. Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations,* p. 2.

19. Deborah Sontag, "Quest for Mideast Peace: How and Why It Failed," *New York Times,* 26 July 2001.

20. Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations,* pp. 32–33.

21. Sontag, "Quest for Mideast Peace."

22. Sarah Roy, "Changing Political Attitudes Among Gaza Refugees," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 19, no. 1 (Autumn 1989), p. 79.

23. Ibid., pp. 80–81.

24. Ibid., p. 81.

25. Amira Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza: Days and Nights in a Land Under Siege,* translated by Elana Wesley and Maxine Kaufman-Lacusta (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), p. 352.

26. See, for example, "Palestinian Refugees: Adrift for Decades," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 12 May 1998, which claims that whereas Arafat routinely guarantees Palestinians the right of return to Palestine, most Palestinians "have accepted political reality"; and which quotes a Lebanese writer, Elias Khoury, as asserting that "after Oslo the Palestinians already are switching from the consciousness of refugees to the consciousness of the diaspora."

27. Zureik, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process,* p. 64, citing a study by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre (JMCC), *Poll: The Year of Autonomy,* Jerusalem, 1995.

28. IPCRI, *The Future of the Palestinian Refugee Issue in Final Status Negotiations: Palestinian Refugees—Their Past, Present, and Future,* Adel Yahya, project director, IPCRI Final Status Publications series, Jerusalem, March 1998, pp. 98–99.

29. BADIL Alternative Information Centre, Press Release, 15 January 1998, *FOFOGNET Digest,* 7–16 January 1998. The survey was undertaken by, among others, the BADIL Alternative Information Centre, the Union of Youth Activities Centres/West Bank, and Al-Quds Open University/Refugee Studies Centre.

30. Council on Foreign Relations, Report of an Independent Task Force, *Strengthening Palestinian Public Institutions: Executive Summary,* Michel Rocard, chairman, Henry Siegman, project director, Yezid Sayigh and Khalil Shikaki, principal authors (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), p. 7.

31. Public Opinion Poll no. 40 conducted by the Center for Palestine Research and Studies (PCRS) on 15–17 April 1999 showed 70 percent support for the peace process, 26 percent opposition; support was strongest among farmers (86 percent), housewives (79 percent), and those with the least income (73 percent), and weakest among students (61 percent) and those with the highest income (57 percent).

32. In July 2000 the Palestinian Authority admitted having secretly maintained a $354 million holding company, the Palestinian Commercial Services Company, which received the majority of the funds collected for the Palestinian Authority by Israel and, instead of transferring them to the Palestinian Authority's financial institutions, supposedly invested them in commercial operations in the West Bank (including the Jericho casino), Gaza, and abroad. *Agence France Presse* report, 6 July 2000.

33. For a description of the role of the Palestinian Authority security forces, including the General Security Service and the Protective Security Service as well as Military Intelligence in systematically extorting money from Palestinian businessmen, see "PLC Report: PA Extorts Protection Money," *Middle East News Line (MENL),* 15 November 1999.

34. Glenn E. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 181.

35. Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza,* p. 329.

36. David Schenker, *Palestinian Democracy and Governance: An Appraisal of the Legislative Council,* Policy Paper no. 51 (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for the Near East, 2000), pp. 38–43.

37. Barry Rubin, "The New PA Elite," *Jerusalem Post,* 19 February 1998, p. 6.

38. Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1997), pp. 56–57.

39. For background on Al-Bahar and on Arafat's economic adviser, Mohammed Rashid (also known as Khalid Salaam), see Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza,* pp. 301–306.

40. Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza,* p. 302.

41. Ibid., pp. 87–88.

42. Ibid., pp. 78–84.

43. For a detailed account of the rioting and the circumstances surrounding it, see *Time,* 7 October 1996, pp. 27–31.

44. Based on my discussions with Palestinian and international observers in Gaza during 1997. Amira Hass mentions rumors that the rioting in Gaza was organized by Fatah on Arafat's orders (*Drinking the Sea at Gaza,* p. 351), but this was not the view of my contacts.

45. Amira Hass records the following instructive anecdote: "'My next-door neighbour has a fantasy of kidnapping an Israeli soldier,' says Abu Jamil from Jabalia [camp]. 'What will you demand in exchange?' we ask him. 'The release of all Palestinian prisoners?' 'The prisoners can go to hell,' he says. 'So what do you want?' we ask. 'More leverage for Arafat in the negotiations?' 'To hell with the negotiations,' he says. 'I just want my work permit back.'" Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza,* p. 282.

46. Graham Usher, *Palestine in Crisis: The Struggle for Peace and Political Independence After Oslo* (London: Pluto Press in association with Transnational Institute [TNI] and Middle East Research and Information Project [MERIP], 1995), p. 50.

47. Mustafa Barghouti, *Palestinian NGOs and Their Role in Building a Civil Society* (Jerusalem: Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, June 1994), cited in Usher, *Palestine in Crisis,* p. 50.

48. Usher, *Palestine in Crisis,* p. 51. In a similar vein, see Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), esp. pp. 255–261.

49. Gershon Baskin, *The Oslo Process: Lessons Learned* (Jerusalem: IPCRI, December 2002), p. 9.

50. Constant reminders from critics of the Oslo process that the process had brought about the effective abandonment of the right of return by the Palestinian Authority (see, for example, such claims by Rosemary Sayigh in "A Right to Return," *Palestine Report,* 8 January 1999) inevitably drew statements to the opposite effect from the Palestinian Authority. See, for example, comments attributed to

Abu al-'Ala in *Al-Hayat al-Jadida,* 28 December 1998, in which he stated that the Palestinian Authority "will insist on the refugees' return and we stress there can be no peace unless this is achieved." *FOFOGNET Digest,* 1–4 January 1999.

51. Tamari, *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations,* p. 49.

52. Shlomo Gazit, *The Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1995), p. 6. Comments by Ziad Abu Zayyad were made in Ziad Abu Zayyad, "The Palestinian Right of Return: A Realistic Approach," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1994), p. 77. Ziad Abu Zayyad was also reported in *Al-Ayyam,* 2 July 1999, as stating that "the Palestinians don't insist on the right of return, but are looking for a middle solution (*haal wasat*) and they will not ask Israel to commit suicide." *FOFOGNET Digest,* 5–6 July 1999.

53. Quoted in *Mideast Mirror,* 26 February 1990, cited in Gowers and Walker, *Behind the Myth,* p. 356.

54. The political ineptitude on the Palestinian side was arguably matched, however, by repeated Israeli proposals, mostly emanating from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to proceed to final status talks without either side having paid detailed attention to the intricacies of the refugee issue.

55. Independent Media Review and Analysis (IMRA, Aaron Lerner, director), "PLC Jamal Shati al-Hindi: No Deal Without Return of '48 Refugees," interview dated 24 March 1998, Kfar Sava Israel.

56. Some insight at the operational level can be gained from Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors," *New York Review of Books,* 9 August 2001. For an analysis of the underlying political dynamics surrounding the decline of the Palestinian Authority under Arafat's leadership and the challenge of younger nationalists and Islamists, see Khalil Shikaki, "Palestinians Divided," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 1 (January–February 2002).

57. Some valuable insights are provided in Glenn E. Robinson, "Israel and the Palestinians: The Bitter Fruits of Hegemonic Peace," *Current History,* January 2001; and Augustus Nichard Norton, "America's Middle East Crisis," *Current History,* January 2001.

58. For an excellent analysis of Palestinian organizations perpetrating suicide bombings and their relationship to the Palestinian Authority, see Human Rights Watch, *Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002).

59. See Danny Rubinstein, "Is Ramallah Burning?" *Ha'aretz,* 28 October 1998.

60. For a comprehensive account of Tanzim and the roles, respectively, of Marwan Barghouti and Jibril Rajoub, the commander of the Palestinian Authority's Preventive Security apparatus in the West Bank, see Pinhas Inbari, "Who Can Control the West Bank?" *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 3, no. 3 (March 2001), pp. 1–5.

61. On the motives behind Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif on 28 September 2000, see Amos Elon, "The Deadlocked City," *New York Review of Books,* 18 October 2001.

62. "An Ever More Vicious Cycle," *The Economist,* 5 March 2002.

63. See Chapter 1. Robert Helmreich, "Stress, Self-Esteem, and Attitudes," in Bert T. King and Elliot McGinnies, eds., *Attitudes, Conflict, and Social Change* (New York: Academic Press, 1972), pp. 36–41.

7

Political Mythologies in Action: The 1997 UNRWA Crisis

Unfortunately, I am compelled to introduce cuts and reductions because of the inadequate financing of UNRWA's budget and the $20 million deficit in the last quarter of 1997.

—Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, 19 August 1997

President Arafat and other Palestinian officials, in addition to popular committees and groups, have requested UNRWA to retract the decision to reduce its services and employees. It has become extremely difficult to convince the man on the street that what has happened is not the result of a "well-woven plot" to dissolve UNRWA, ending its role of sole caretaker of the refugees, and bring an internationally dishonourable end to the refugee issue and bring the question of Palestine to the final negotiations table with no legal stand on the status of refugees.

—As'ad Abdul Rahman, PLO Executive Committee member in charge of the Refugees and Displaced Portfolio, 9 September 1997

[UNRWA's] moves are aimed at settling the Palestinians in Arab countries, as provided for in the peace agreements with the Zionist enemy, in the course of liquidating the Palestinian problem and cancelling the Palestinian people's right to return to their homeland as stipulated in UN Resolutions 194 and 237.[1]

—Jordanian opposition political parties, *Jordan Times,* 4–5 September 1997

UNRWA declares war on refugees!

—Adnan Abu Amer, journalist, *Al-Resalah,* 21 August 1997

The point was made at the outset of this book that there may be value in considering the relationship between political mythologies of social units—such as refugees—and the behavior of public institutions such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It may also be easier to understand the impact of refugee

mythologies by observing their application in particular situations, rather than through discussing them in abstract or general terms. An opportunity to make such an analysis was provided in mid-1997 when a financial crisis in UNRWA led the management of that agency to announce a series of emergency austerity measures. If implemented, those measures would have reduced the level of services UNRWA had traditionally made available to the 3.4 million Palestinian refugees then registered with it. After about three weeks of heightened and often intense political activity between the refugees, UNRWA, the Palestinian Authority, and Western donor countries, the funding of the agency was supplemented and the crisis passed.[2]

The events were newsworthy for only a brief period, even in the Middle East. The crisis was not a defining moment in terms of the Palestinian refugee experience or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Beyond the region, the developments attracted very little attention. They were seen, among Western donor countries at least, as having some, but not much direct importance for the Middle East peace process. UNRWA had had financial crises before. And the financial dimension of the immediate issue—the need for additional funding to cover a projected deficit of around $20 million in the operating budget of the agency for that year—was modest when compared to the pledges by donors since 1993 of over $4 billion in support for Palestinian development.

However, like most other encounters between the Palestinians and external parties impinging ultimately upon the relationship between the Palestinians and Israel, the crisis confronting UNRWA in 1997 was part of a process deeply affected by the intangible influences of history, emotions, psychology, self-esteem, and perceptions of capabilities and intentions.[3] Analysis of the crisis therefore provides some interesting insights into the role played by refugee memories and mythologies in Palestinian politics, including the manipulation of those phenomena by the parties involved.

There is of course a case for interpreting the events of 1997 as an example of political interaction between refugees and donors over funding, the dynamics of the Palestinian power structure and competition within that framework over the allocation of resources, and the pursuit of specific political objectives by the various parties. It is unlikely, however, that the refugee reaction to the crisis would have been so strong, so well organized, or so threatening in the eyes of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) if it had not tapped into, and been energized by, notions of Palestinian identity and rights. Those notions had their roots in mythologies peculiar to the refugees themselves.

Issues of material benefit, and a sense of frustration of hopes and ambitions, while obviously relevant, also do not explain adequately the approach taken by the PLO to the political management of the crisis. As will be discussed, the PLO's political strategy for dealing with the crisis related and

responded to refugee mythologies concerning their rights, the obligations of others, and notions of conspiracy against their interests, as well as defending their material benefits.

Finally, analysis focused on the question of material benefits and deprivation does not account for the striking disparity between publicly expressed Palestinian perceptions of the nature of the crisis and the perceptions of Western donor countries. What was, to the donors, essentially a financial crisis, albeit one with political implications, was debated among refugees mainly in the realm of the Middle East peace process and its implications for the refugee issue. At least in the public arena, the financial issues involved appeared to be of lesser importance to refugees than the symbolism associated with the ongoing role of the agency, and the fear that it was being starved of funds for political purposes. In short, while it was true that the crisis facing UNRWA had other, rather mundane causes upon which the donors tended to focus, refugee mythologies shaped their perception of the crisis in a very different fashion.

The 1997 Financial Crisis in UNRWA

Like its predecessors, the underlying cause of the 1997 financial crisis was a combination of rising need as a result of demographic developments in the refugee population and insufficient funding for the agency to meet those needs at levels it considered appropriate. In large measure it arose, like previous such crises, because of the need for UNRWA to find its own funds from among the donor community and because of the ongoing pressure on UNRWA's budget as the number of registered refugees increased.

Chapter 5 described that as long as the growth of funds generally matched needs, the agency was not under pressure to initiate questioning of the relevance and appropriateness, in relation to its original mandate, of the activities it was undertaking. There were also strong political reasons for not raising such questions, especially within the agency itself, within the refugee community, and with host governments.[4]

UNRWA insisted it was up to the donor countries and host governments to take decisions about the priority to be accorded to various services provided by the agency, should the donor countries regard prioritization among its functions as the optimum response to the budget dilemma. All refugees remained eligible, at least in theory, for UNRWA services.

Though for many years it lurched from one financial crisis to another, UNRWA survived because as long as the situation of the Palestinian refugees was not resolved, it was generally accepted by Western donors that the agency fulfilled humanitarian needs that would not otherwise be met—for political, financial, and technical reasons—by host countries and the

Palestinian Authority. Moreover, since refugees, host countries, and the Palestinian Authority were not formally willing to accept that a more satisfactory permanent solution to the refugee issue was beyond reach, the international community as a whole, as represented through the UN General Assembly, had no objection to the continuation of UNRWA's role. Most member states welcomed it.[5]

In 1997, concern over the deteriorating financial situation facing UNRWA was combined with uncertainty within the agency and among the refugees about the direction and timing of further developments in the peace process. That process, though largely stalled since 1996, was widely expected to have far-reaching effects on the agency's role in the West Bank and Gaza, and uncertain implications for its role in other fields. Among refugees, whose notions of identity, as described in the preceding chapters, were closely associated with the memory of lost villages and the dream of return, and who clung to UNRWA services as both a symbol of their political rights and a key sustaining factor in their daily lives, the fear of marginalization and its consequences was strong.[6]

In 1996, as in most previous periods of financial crisis, the agency was able to avoid insolvency through additional pledges, at an extraordinary meeting of donors and host countries in September 1996, of $14.3 million, including $12.3 million toward the agency's 1996 regular budget. It also maintained previously imposed austerity measures and introduced some new ones.[7] Despite those measures, the agency began 1997 with a working capital of only $5 million, compared to its monthly average expenditure of $22 million.[8]

Following the financial crisis of 1996, pressure grew from key donors (especially the United States, but also Canada, Australia, and Switzerland) for UNRWA to propose solutions to its financial crisis by allocating priorities among its programs. Not all major donors were prepared to push the agency on that issue. Canada and the United Kingdom, while supporting the idea of prioritization, tended to focus more heavily on the possibility of achieving administrative efficiencies and greater transparency in budget processes and, in the case of the United Kingdom, improved planning capability, rather than overhauling strategic thinking. Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Japan, and France did not seek to put much pressure on UNRWA to prioritize.

Canada and Switzerland expressed interest in examining the governance of the agency, apparently with a view to giving donors greater say in its management, but without explaining how that could be brought about without first engaging in an extended and distracting debate within the UN system over how such an arrangement would operate. Nor was it clear how such changes could be introduced in cooperation with the host countries (Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon), which appeared quite satisfied with their

existing role and influence over the agency. It appeared that all major donors preferred to avoid direct engagement with host countries and the Palestinian Authority on the political implications of changing UNRWA's role.

UNRWA insisted that it was the responsibility of the international community, not the agency, to fulfill the assurances given to the refugees that their interests would be protected, or to tell the refugees that their expectations would have to be adjusted to a new reality. The agency took the view that it was up to the donors, not UNRWA, to decide to raise significant political questions about the strategic direction upon which UNRWA was embarked.

An informal meeting of donors and host governments in Amman in June 1997 highlighted the basic conundrum neatly, without resolving it. There was agreement by the various parties on the importance of "partnership" (a term actively promoted by the agency at the meeting) without any of them, including UNRWA, spelling out what was meant by the concept. Instead, a key outcome of the meeting was expressed in the following terms:

> The donors requested the Commissioner-General to provide host governments and donors with options for possible programme reductions, by way of contingency planning, in time for further informal discussions prior to the formal meetings of the Advisory Commission and the General Assembly. The Commissioner-General rather emphasized that the Agency would be willing to provide factual information on Agency programmes and associated unit costs as a basis for advising the donor countries and host governments. The Agency would provide information on the consequences of the gap between income and expenditure but it would not make recommendations on reduction of programme or field operations, on the grounds that these were matters for the international community to address. The host governments emphasized that there should be no reductions.[9]

The agency responded to financial pressures in 1997, as with crises of earlier years, not by cutting its programs but by reducing the quality of its services, reflected in overcrowding of classrooms,[10] ever-higher patient to staff ratios for agency doctors,[11] the overburdening of agency social workers, cuts in maintenance, and freezing recruitment. Unlike previous years, it turned increasingly to the use of contracted employees.[12] Concerns among the Palestinian staff about loss of job security rose. There was growing concern about the impact of these changes on agency performance, especially in the education area.

August–September 1997

The crisis was eventually brought to a head—for reasons that were not seriously questioned by any of the parties on the donor side or by the host

governments—by the Commissioner-General, Peter Hansen, exercising his responsibility of due care in the management of the agency. Hansen had been warning since April 1997 that UNRWA was verging on bankruptcy. By midyear the agency had drawn down its working capital to unsustainably low levels of less than one week of salary cover for its employees. It faced the prospect of a $20 million deficit in the budget required to sustain what UNRWA considered to be an acceptable minimum level of agency services, and the added prospect of a cash shortfall of some $10 million before the end of the year. The agency acted because it was facing the prospect of financial insolvency and a consequent suspension of its operations.

On 19 August 1997, citing "the inadequate financing of UNRWA's budget and the $20 million deficit in the last quarter of 1997," the Commissioner-General announced that certain steps would be taken "to avoid technical bankruptcy."[13] Those measures included a 15 percent reduction in international staff (which, as mentioned above, was largely happening already). There was to be a general freeze in recruitment, including of 249 additional teachers needed agencywide to cope with the growth in the student population (although the agency announced it had also decided "exceptionally" to recruit in the Gaza Strip and West Bank double the number of budgeted replacement teachers, but on a contract basis).

UNRWA announced the discontinuation of its contribution to the provision of university scholarships; henceforth scholarships would only be extended if donors provided funding specifically for that purpose. It also announced the discontinuation of allocations from UNRWA's regular budget for shelter rehabilitation and emergency cash assistance, and the cancellation of nonemergency hospitalization services in November and December 1997. "Special Hardship Cases" were exempted, however, from the freeze on hospitalization, and it was announced that "emergency lifesaving interventions" would "of course" continue to be made.

UNRWA said that, for the first time in its history, it was "reviewing school charges as levied by the host authorities, with a view to adopting similar ones."[14] It was later mentioned that the agency had in mind, in that regard, the fees charged to all enrolled students by the authorities in Jordan and the Palestinian self-rule areas.[15] UNRWA made, for the second consecutive year, an extraordinary appeal to donor countries for additional contributions to complete the year without a disruption in basic services.

Amid considerable turmoil among refugee populations in Gaza and elsewhere, donor countries responded at an informal meeting in Amman on 9 September 1997 by increasing contributions to the regular programs of the agency by $21 million. That enabled UNRWA to announce it had decided to revoke the measures that had given rise to most opposition, namely those relating to restrictions on access to UNRWA-sponsored hospitalization arrangements for refugees and the foreshadowed introduction of

charges for refugee children attending UNRWA elementary and primary schools. The controversy then subsided.[16]

UNRWA Perceptions

There was no doubt from UNRWA's perspective that the crisis was genuine. Projections of the agency's regular cash budget presented to donors strongly suggested that its financial situation was unsustainable unless it cut back its operations or raised more funds immediately. There may have been scope for UNRWA to debate during the crisis what the appropriate minimum level of its services should have been, and what priorities it should accord among its various programs and among its five fields of operation. However, it would have been a major challenge for the agency's leadership to define a strategic vision for UNRWA to deal with the changing realities of its financial situation. It would have been an even greater challenge to communicate that vision to its key audiences, especially the refugee audience and its own Palestinian staff, in order to secure, perhaps, a more predictable and yet politically acceptable footing for the agency. There was also a firm conviction within UNRWA that the agency was entitled, as a UN institution whose programs had repeatedly been endorsed by the General Assembly, to receive the resources it required to fulfill its objectives.

Those factors led the agency to stand its ground. By doing so, UNRWA placed strong political pressure upon the donors to come to its assistance without more strategic issues being seriously addressed on the part of the donors, host governments, or UNRWA itself. Instead of being pushed into a new approach, the tactical choices made by the agency enabled the crisis to be managed largely without significant additional direct impact upon existing programs.

The thrust of the agency's handling of the situation was in general to be directed toward the political management of the crisis from a standpoint that was directly in line with political sentiment in the UN General Assembly. It was therefore strongly sympathetic to Palestinian political concerns in general and to refugee concerns in particular. For the most part, the agency focused its lobbying effort on encouraging the major Western donors to realize the linkages between UNRWA programs, on the one hand, and the political interests and priority policy concerns of the donors themselves, on the other.

The agency's press release announcing the measures began by invoking the image of consultation with the PLO chairman. It mentioned that Arafat had referred to "the great socio-economic hardship being faced by the Palestinians as a result of the closures" and that Arafat had promised he would immediately write to certain donors to assist UNRWA. It made no

mention of the approximately $14 million owed to UNRWA at that stage by the Palestinian Authority for outstanding reimbursement of value-added tax and customs charges incurred by UNRWA on its behalf.[17] Rather, it left the impression that Arafat was active on the agency's behalf, while placing the responsibility for resolving the situation upon the donor community.

The press release also alluded to the Commissioner-General's concern, like that of Arafat, that the Palestinian refugee population was already "experiencing severe socio-economic hardship and . . . tight restrictions on economic activity and mobility in certain fields." It implied a high level of empathy with the refugee population and referred to meetings the Commissioner-General had held with "*mukhtars,* camp committees and area staff union representatives . . . to explain the context in which the Agency [had] been forced to introduce these measures, which in any case covered only one-third of the 1997 deficit."[18]

UNRWA was fully prepared, as in previous crises, to highlight to donors the risks associated with a cutback in its role. In writing to donors (and to the foreign ministers of host governments) shortly before the announcement of 19 August, the Commissioner-General alluded to the possibility of a violent reaction to the measures:

> UNRWA is being forced by circumstances beyond its control, in particular the inadequate financing from the international community, to take . . . drastic measures. I would invite you to consider the possible consequences of a reduction in services to a refugee population which is already experiencing severe socio-economic hardship, is subjected to tight restrictions on economic activity and mobility in certain fields, and which is increasingly losing faith in the ability of the peace process to bring about an enhanced quality of life. The possibility of a violent reaction to these measures cannot be excluded.
>
> For differing reasons, ranging from desperate socio-economic need to the political importance for the Palestine refugees of the commitment of the international community, expressed first and foremost through the financing of services via UNRWA, the 3.4 million Palestine refugees cling to UNRWA services as a symbol of their "rights" and as a matter of international obligation. Cuts or reductions in services are seen not only in quantitative terms, but also as a concomitant drop in international recognition of the Palestine refugee issue.
>
> With the stalled peace process in a fragile condition, with the Palestinian Authority strapped for cash as its revenue transfers are blocked in the aftermath of the 30 July double suicide bombing in Jerusalem, with host Governments unable or understandably reluctant to assume any additional burden, the only option is additional contributions. The Agency cuts are already the maximum, and will expose the region to unrest.[19]

In the lead-up to the 9 September 1997 meeting, agency officials highlighted the impact of the proposed cuts to donor country representatives. They stressed that their effects in the West Bank and Gaza would be felt by

youth who grew up during the intifada and whose children were now being threatened with loss of access to schools, whose children were being crowded into classrooms in buildings that were not being adequately maintained, whose families could not be referred to hospitals except in life-threatening situations, who were unable to receive the financial support needed to live in conditions of normal human decency, and whose alienation from all forms of authority was growing. It was argued that their anger could be turned against the Palestinian Authority at a critical time in the peace process, and that the costs of restoring that situation would vastly outweigh the relatively modest sums the agency was seeking.

From a human development perspective, the agency pointed out that one immediate impact of the imposition of fees for many families would be a greater likelihood for girls than boys to be denied formal education. As a result, many would marry earlier and would remain functionally illiterate for the remainder of their lives. Not only would such an outcome be a contradiction of the important aid goals of most donor countries and the UN, including concern for the protection and empowerment of women, but it would also place the health of children at risk, as medicines were improperly used, nutrition needs were inadequately understood, and simple written instructions would not be followed. Younger marriage would also increase fertility rates and thereby spur population growth above its existing high levels. It would deepen the cycle of dependency among the poorer refugee population, contribute especially in camps to environmental problems, and raise questions about the sustainability of infrastructural development, including basic services. UNRWA also emphasized that its position was attuned to the wishes of the General Assembly, and underlined its commitment to management reform.

In a press conference in Geneva on 26 August 1997, UNRWA Commissioner-General said that the austerity measures ("these cruel measures") could still be avoided if donor countries came up with the "relatively small sum" of $20 million at the donor meeting in Amman in September. He noted that the measures announced by the agency had not been received well in the region, mentioning that a joint statement by various Palestinian groups had called it a policy of "starvation and humiliation" and that protest actions would continue.[20]

Western Donor Perceptions

Perceptions among the Western donor countries of the origins and nature of the crisis, and desirable responses to it, were mixed. As mentioned earlier, elements of the Western donor community had been concerned after 1996 to see a more transparent approach on the part of the agency to its management

of their funds. Most of the major non-Arab donors had insisted that the agency embark upon a series of management reforms aimed at producing greater efficiencies in its overall performance, and the agency had launched that process.[21] Beyond those factors, however, there was little common ground between the agency and the donors, or among the donors themselves, regarding the desirable functions and future role of the agency. Perceptions varied most markedly between Western donors and their Arab counterparts, whose reactions are discussed later in this chapter.

To the limited extent that they were seeking reform within UNRWA to place it on a more sustainable footing, the Western donors were focused mainly on administrative efficiencies, budget transparency, and in a very preliminary fashion, governance questions. A focus on management practice was probably a more comfortable option for Western donors and UNRWA alike to pursue than more politically sensitive questions touching upon the core mythologies of the refugee community and the future of the refugee issue in the Middle East peace process.

The donors emphasized that the agency needed to present a business plan that would outline in which ways the Commissioner-General intended to rationalize support services, assuming additional savings could be made. In contrast, UNRWA officials sought constantly to impress upon donor representatives the drain on UNRWA's budget of the nonregular program components such as the move of UNRWA headquarters from Vienna to Gaza, and the European Gaza Hospital, a key element of the Gaza health infrastructure whose construction was completed by UNRWA in 1997 but that had remained unoccupied because of a failure on the part of its sponsors, the European Union, and the Palestinian Authority to agree on who was to take responsibility for its recurrent expenditure.[22]

UNRWA questioned the utility of donors focusing heavily on seeking savings in the area of administrative services, or on the issue of governance. It pointed out that with a number of instances of administrative reform proposed by the donors—such as the improvement of the agency's information technology—the agency would have had to spend substantial amounts before it would reap the benefits of additional savings; and it remained to be seen whether the donors would be willing to meet such costs. And since UNRWA's administrative overhead costs were actually less than 10 percent of its total expenditures, the agency argued, with considerable justification, that there were likely to be only limited savings to be harvested in that area. The agency stressed that the process of achieving further increases in its efficiency and effectiveness had to be first and foremost through institutional strengthening, including the development of research capabilities and training, rather than through budget-driven measures.

Following the signing of the Cairo Agreement in May 1994, it was reported that State Department officials had urged UNRWA to address the

question of its own demise.[23] The United States might therefore have been expected to seize the opportunity for reform presented by the crisis. The United States had taken that approach, however, based on two premises. The first premise was that a fully fledged peace treaty between Israel and the PLO would be in place by May 1999, the end of the interim period allowed for under the Oslo Accords. That approach was based, in turn, on a second premise, namely, that the final solution to the refugee issue would be resettlement in their host or other third countries, together with the return of a limited number of refugees to the emerging Palestinian entity in the West Bank and Gaza.[24]

By 1997, with the Oslo-based peace process virtually frozen, the assumption that a peace treaty would be in place by 1999, at least, appeared increasingly unlikely to be achieved. The prospects for returning some refugees to a Palestinian entity and resettling others in situ had scarcely improved either. A wider review of UNRWA's role under those political circumstances was bound to be more problematic than if undertaken while the peace process was moving ahead. Moreover, it was by no means certain that by 1997 the peace process strategy of the U.S. government included more than a passing interest in, or awareness of, the refugee issue and UNRWA.

The suggestions advanced by UNRWA about the linkage between regional stability and the interests of various parties in sustaining that stability, on the one hand, and the situation of the Palestinian refugees, on the other hand, were questionable. UNRWA maintained the theme of impending unrest and possible implications for stability in the region of any direct cuts in services without offering—or being asked to offer—any serious analysis of what connection, if any, there may have been between regional stability and the making of such cutbacks.

The likelihood of the situation on the ground rebounding significantly against the political interests and objectives of the donor countries so far as the peace process was concerned was quite low. Despite concerns frequently expressed by host governments, and by agency staff, there was little likelihood that the stability of the Palestinian Authority or of any regional government would have been seriously challenged by refugee discontent. Nor would any regional government have been likely to adopt a markedly different approach to Israel or the United States, so far as their national interests were concerned, because of refugee dissatisfaction with the level of support provided by UNRWA and fears that it was being phased out. The host country governments clearly had the will and the capacity to retain control of the situation.

So far as the situation in Gaza and the West Bank was concerned, despite the high visibility of the financial crisis, its political volatility was of a lesser order of magnitude than the politically driven disturbances of 1994 and 1996, discussed in Chapter 6, which the Palestinian Authority

managed to keep under control. Only perhaps in Gaza, where abnormally high proportions of the total population (74 percent) were registered refugees, where a high proportion of refugees (55 percent) were concentrated in camps, and where the refugees may have been able to concentrate protests against identifiable, unpopular, and accessible targets in the form of the institutions of the Palestinian Authority, might there have been the possibility of extended disturbances and some physical damage to Palestinian Authority and UNRWA facilities. Such disturbances would have been unlikely, however, to have had any significant effect on regional stability or the overall outcome of the peace process.

Although Western donors in general wanted the refugees and host governments to appreciate the budget-driven realities facing them and the agency, most of them were more concerned—indeed were primarily concerned—to avoid the prospect of deepening political unrest within the refugee community. No Western donor was prepared to welcome the steps UNRWA had announced in August as moves in the direction of achieving greater sustainability in its approach, or disposed to use the crisis to insist that UNRWA prioritize its functions and live within its means. There was no serious questioning during the crisis of whether the agency should be asked, as it could have been, to address issues relating to its own future role. There were no moves by the donors to make UNRWA downsize, or otherwise change the nature of the agency, as part of a wider approach to the Middle East peace process.

Even among those donor countries that were encouraged by the crisis to be still more vocal concerning the need for UNRWA to reform its management approach, the imagery of the refugee protests was sufficiently compelling to mobilize additional resources before there was much evidence that UNRWA's reform efforts had made headway. An important opportunity to lay the foundations for the introduction of a serious reassessment of UNRWA's role was in effect foregone because of its perceived political consequences.

Arab Donors

In marked contrast to the concerns held among the Western donors, discussed earlier, about the financial situation of UNRWA and the political implications of a reduction in the services it provided, at no stage in the 1997 crisis was there much evidence of concern among the Gulf Arab states about the issue of long-term financial viability of the agency. Nor was support expressed for revisiting the agency's role.

The Gulf states appeared mainly concerned to keep a low profile throughout the crisis, and to wait to see the outcome of the application of

political pressure upon the Western donors before deciding on any particular course of action on their own part. Beyond a general sense of obligation to uphold a steadfast Arab political rejection of the detested Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the emotional impact of Palestinian refugee mythologies clearly had little impact beyond refugee circles in Gulf Arab countries. The historical and practical as well as political reasons for that situation are discussed below.

In response to recommendations by consultants appointed in 1996 to review UNRWA's financial management, the agency had set out in the first half of 1997 to expand its donor base and engage traditional and new donors in the Persian Gulf in order to increase their share of UNRWA's regular budget from 1 percent to 5 percent. In dollar terms, this represented an increase from about $3 million per annum to $15 million per annum.[25]

That decision tended to obscure the fact that the Gulf Arab countries had been relatively generous donors to UNRWA since 1993. While total Gulf contributions amounted to only $8.5 million of the $297 million received by UNRWA from donors in 1997, when measured as a proportion of donor gross national product the contributions of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates were between two and ten times more generous than those of the United States. Kuwait was, in relative terms, by far the most generous UNRWA donor in 1997.[26]

Unlike most Western donors other than the Nordic countries, the main Arab oil-producing countries providing support for UNRWA (that is, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates) already came close to meeting the level of contributions they would have been expected to make according to the UN-assessed scale of contributions. Most of the Gulf states also provided substantial public and private financial assistance to Palestinian and other Islamic humanitarian causes. And despite the Gulf states' misgivings about the Palestinian leadership, especially in the aftermath of the Gulf War, there was still a significant residue of interest and support in Kuwait and most other Gulf countries for the Palestinians as a people.

The United Arab Emirates, though it had failed to make its payment to UNRWA's regular budget in 1996, made up for that oversight in mid-1997. Saudi Arabia made only a slight increase in the level of its support to UNRWA's regular budget in 1997, but it had come to the financial rescue of the agency in 1996 by allocating $4.6 million for projects under the Peace Implementation Program (PIP). Even Kuwait, despite ongoing anger at the betrayal it felt it had suffered at the hands of some of its Palestinian residents during the Iraqi invasion of 1990, had continued to pay its contributions to UNRWA each year. Kuwait also provided substantial project funding to the agency.

During the first half of 1997 the Gulf states were encouraged by UNRWA to attach importance to a sustained role for the agency, in terms of

their own interests in regional peace and stability, and in terms of the humanitarian and human resources development needs of the Palestine refugees. UNRWA sought to present itself as an effective multilateral service provider possessing expertise in human resources development programs that could be delivered on behalf of the donor countries without encountering insurmountable obstacles.

UNRWA found, however, that it was plowing a well-tilled field in which its case was not accorded a high priority among incessant requests from the Palestinian Authority and from individual high-profile Palestinians seeking additional financial support for their particular causes, and among similar requests from a wide range of humanitarian and other Islamic causes.[27] In addition, the preference among the Gulf states was to extend aid directly wherever possible, and in any event to support projects rather than recurrent expenditures. The ongoing weakness of oil prices at the time already made it unlikely that Gulf states would be willing to make significant additional funding available on an ongoing basis.

The Gulf media was generally critical of UNRWA initiative. It appeared to have difficulty in distinguishing between the case for supporting the Palestinian Authority, to which generous assistance was already being provided, on the one hand, and the case for supporting refugees, through UNRWA rather than the Palestinian Authority, on the other. And implicit in some of its commentary was the sense that renewed conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, while it might have affected the security of Israel and its neighbors, was unlikely to have an impact on the Gulf states.

It was argued that the West was responsible for the creation of the refugee problem and should therefore pay for the agency's budget. Moves to increase Arab donor contributions, some commentators suggested, would come at the expense of the principle of international responsibility for resolving the issue on the basis of the right of return. It was claimed that UNRWA's success in convincing the Arab League to approve a resolution calling on Arab states to finance UNRWA programs would "free the donor countries, especially those which made the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees, from their responsibility for the problem and from their financial commitments to the refugees."[28]

Expressions of sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians were commonplace in the media, and charitable fundraising drives on behalf of refugees through telethons were generally very successful. However, there was also, in parallel, an undertone of antipathy and distrust toward the compromises Arafat was seen as making to maintain relations with the United States and to seek a modus vivendi with the Likud-led government in Israel.

Effective fundraising in the Gulf would have required the agency to invest substantial time and patience in the establishment of close connections with senior members of the different ruling families to obtain access

to the relevant councils, to expedite the decisionmaking process on funding requests, and to raise the profile of the agency. Without the patronage of a member of the ruling family in each of the key Gulf states, the agency was unlikely to cope with the intricacies of local political maneuvering. In the small ruling societies of the Gulf, relations between government and prominent community figures associated with major local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were usually intimate, and NGOs would not move without direct or implicit government approval of their activity.

The agency was able to draw upon the assistance of members of the Palestinian Welfare Association, a Geneva-based nongovernmental organization of wealthy Palestinian benefactors. It developed links with the Palestinian diaspora in the Gulf and elsewhere. UNRWA could not afford, however, to pursue the Arab donors more actively while support from more traditional Western donors was at risk of diminishing. The end result was that the Gulf Arab states did not become heavily involved in the resolution of the 1997 crisis, nor did they represent a potential source of strength for any efforts that could have been made to refocus the agency.

Other Reactions in the Region

Among those countries hosting the refugees, as well as within the Palestinian Authority, there was nervousness at the prospect of coming under pressure to accept a larger share of the financial burden of supporting the refugee population, and of course the political consequences of doing so. Fear among Lebanese of the Palestinian refugee settlement in Lebanon led to an upsurge in attacks on UNRWA in the Lebanese media, as well as expressions of concern that any reduction in UNRWA services in Lebanon would exacerbate an already precarious economic situation. Lebanese foreign minister Fares Boueiz said a reported decrease in UNRWA's budget for Lebanon was an attempt to pressure Lebanon and other host countries into accepting "certain conditions for peace," whereas the Palestinian refugees were an international responsibility.[29] A hunger strike began in Beirut among a group of about fifteen refugees on 2 September, as well as strikes and sit-ins in UNRWA installations in refugee camps.[30]

The director-general of the Jordanian Department of Palestinian Affairs, Ibrahim Tarshihi, rejected any reduction in UNRWA services and said Jordan would raise the issue with donor countries and other host governments.[31] While fairly restrained in its tone, Jordanian press coverage focused primarily on the nature of UNRWA's announced measures and official reactions to them. There was extensive coverage of the lead-up to the informal donors meeting of 9 September 1997. Some Jordanians, including a columnist in *Al-Dustour* who wrote two articles about UNRWA cuts,

sought to use commentary on the crisis to develop political support in advance of parliamentary elections due to be held in November 1997. Plans were reported to link opposition political parties, refugees, and UNRWA staff unions to resist the introduction of the agency's measures. Opposition political parties in Jordan also accused UNRWA of being part of a plot to settle the refugees and to eliminate the refugee problem.[32] There were calls for UNRWA to be linked to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), mistakenly believing that this would provide a clearer focus on the repatriation of Palestinians as displaced peoples, rather than on their rehabilitation or employment where they were located.[33]

Reactions in Syria were muted, reflecting tight Syrian security controls over any unsanctioned political activity. A demonstration was held at a health center at Yarmouk camp in Damascus on 2 September, and Palestinian opposition groups in Syria denounced UNRWA measures.[34] As in Jordan, delegations of refugees lodged protests with the UNRWA field office.[35]

The Palestinian Politics of the Crisis

When the 1997 crisis emerged, it fueled a situation in which, as outlined in preceding chapters, the Palestinian refugee audience, with its distinctive collective memories and political mythologies, was under serious economic and political stress. Refugees were concerned, in the face of external pressures, to cling to those mythologies—particularly about their rights as a people, the responsibilities of others toward them as symbolized by UNRWA, and their entitlement to return and to redress for the suffering they had endured. Those beliefs were central to their sense of identity and to their sense of hope.

Although the 1997 crisis was devoid of the sorts of political agendas on the parts of UNRWA or the donor countries that were ascribed to those parties by elements among the refugee population, Palestinian refugee mythologies caused the 1997 crisis to be understood among Palestinian refugees in very distinctive terms. They saw it as reflecting a malevolent interest on the part of donors, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel in determining the direction of political events in which UNRWA—and they—were a key part. As will be discussed below, refugee mythologies and refugee perceptions of external parties, the Palestinian leadership, and UNRWA also had a significant influence on the approach taken to the crisis by the Palestinian leadership.

Refugee Reactions

There was an immediate political response among the Palestinian refugees to the UNRWA announcement of 19 August 1997. UNRWA classes were

boycotted in schools in Gaza. Well-organized demonstrations and occasional sit-ins were held against the introduction of the announced measures. Delegations of refugee representatives, *mukhtars* (traditional notables at the village, now camp, level), and UNRWA staff sought to make their concerns known directly and through petitions to UNRWA management in all fields and at headquarters. There was some stone-throwing directed at the agency's field headquarters and the headquarters building in Gaza, and plenty of noise and agitation, especially in Gaza.

The PLO response to the crisis was the lead item on Palestinian radio and television for several days. There was extensive comment on the crisis by Palestine Legislative Council (PLC) and Palestinian National Council (PNC) members. The PLC held an emergency meeting in Gaza to discuss UNRWA, highlighting the negative effects of the cutbacks. The chairman of the PLC's Refugees Committee, Jamal Shati al-Hindi, said that UNRWA had cried wolf in the past, but this time the crisis was genuine. The head of the PNC's Refugee Committee called for a program of action to deal with the situation. Suha Arafat, wife of the PLO chairman, the Palestinian Authority minister for social welfare, Umm Jihad, Haidar Abdul Shafie, and many other prominent personalities stressed the added burden the measures would place on the refugee population. As discussed in more detail below, Hamas and UNRWA staff union representatives denounced the moves as a conspiracy.

There was an overwhelming disposition among the Palestinian refugees to maintain their sense of collective dignity under pressure. That perception was also reflected in the concerns expressed during meetings between UNRWA officials and representatives of camp committees and *mukhtars,* respectively. The refugee response at one meeting with *mukhtars* in Gaza, held by the agency to explain the reasons for the deepening financial crisis and to warn of the possibility that additional stringencies would have to be instituted, was to declare that they would rather see the agency phased out than suffer ongoing humiliation. They were opposed, they said, to pleading for assistance from those who were seeking "to close the refugee file" anyway, and while the services provided by UNRWA to refugees continued to be eroded away.

There were also some moments in Gaza of wry humor. Unconfirmed reports suggested that UNRWA school buses were used in Gaza to move students to and from demonstrations against the agency. A major demonstration was planned for 9 September at UNRWA Headquarters Gaza to coincide with the meeting of donors in Amman that day. The sand track in front of UNRWA headquarters building was graded. A marquee was constructed for VIPs from the Palestinian Authority who were to address the demonstration. Street vendors (many of whom were sponsored under UNRWA's very successful microenterprise program) set up shop early to sell refreshments to the expected crowd. In the event, since the positive outcomes

of the meeting in Amman were known before noon, the crowd and the vendors drifted away before lunchtime and the marquee disappeared. The track remained ungraded thereafter.

From the outbreak of the controversy, two key themes were evident in refugee reactions. First, the measures announced by the agency were generally portrayed as an attempted abandonment of the international community's responsibilities toward the refugee community that would place additional burdens upon needy families. The foreshadowed introduction of school fees was especially resented, given traditional Palestinian preoccupation with education as the means for securing a better future. Many Palestinian refugee parents of students attending UNRWA schools were naturally concerned at the prospect of additional financial burdens. They were uncertain what response they should make if the agency went ahead as it had foreshadowed.

Second, the measures were widely interpreted in the Palestinian media and among Palestinian refugee political figures as being part of a more extensive political conspiracy. The measures were announced at a time when the Israeli Defense Forces had imposed a strict closure of the West Bank and Gaza following suicide bomb attacks in Jerusalem on 30 July. A further attack on 4 September spelled real economic disaster and produced even greater popular pessimism about the peace process.[36]

As discussed earlier in this book, the Palestinian leadership was already suffering from suspicion among the refugee community that it was prepared, under pressure from Israel and the United States, to accept the irrevocable compromising of Palestinian refugee aspirations central to their political mythologies and collective memories. The financial crisis was seen accordingly, and quite determinedly, by Palestinian refugees to be a manifestation of plans by the United States and other donors, with the presumed support of the agency, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel, to bring about the phasing out of UNRWA prior to the just resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue.[37] The perception that the financial crisis was supposedly aimed at bringing an end to the refugee issue by the forcible integration of refugees into the populations of host countries was in line with refugee reactions to UNRWA financial crises dating back to the earliest days of the agency.[38]

Many refugees refused to accept the reality of the agency's financial problems, believing that the budget deficit either did not exist or had been fabricated as part of the political plot mentioned earlier.[39] The practical concerns of demography, running costs, and rising expectations that increasingly called into question the future of UNRWA as a functioning institution were largely dismissed by refugees. They insisted that these issues were the responsibility of the international community, if such concerns were genuine. The Palestinian Authority was placed under pressure to

see, at a minimum, that the international community did deal with these issues.

Although it was not clear which concerns—the material or the political—were generally uppermost in the minds of individual refugees, political interpretations of the crisis clearly received the widest airing in public commentaries. Commentators such as Naji Jarrar and Said Siam, and columnists in *Al-Quds* and *Al-Ayyam* all focused almost exclusively upon the perceived political dimension of the measures.

In reality, historical levels of donor support extended to UNRWA, both relatively and in dollar terms, had been sustained. It was also obvious to anyone dealing with the donors that there was no coherent political program lurking among them to phase out the agency and to bury the refugee issue. The tenacity of the conspiracy theory advocates was all the more remarkable because of the absence, as discussed above, of any evidence of pressure from the donors to use the financial crisis to press for significant reevaluation of the basic approach or mandate of the agency.

With a Likud government firmly in place in Israel, however, and with the ascendancy of the Palestinian Authority's political agenda over their own, satisfying refugee demands for return and for compensation appeared to be a virtual impossibility in the foreseeable future. Rather than having to face directly that reality, it appeared to suit both the refugees and the Palestinian leadership to sustain the core elements of refugee mythology—including the centrality of UNRWA as an institution to that political mythology—and to fit its financial crisis into a predilection for conspiracy theories.

The refugees were not party to the making by UNRWA, or the donors and host governments, or the PLO, of the decisions affecting them. The disparity in power between themselves, the PLO leadership, and the donor countries was obvious, and it affected communication between them. The influence of peer-group attitudes in a situation of intense collective pressure was likely to be stronger than any contrary influence the Palestinian leadership could expect to exert. Concerns about the costs that would be incurred if UNRWA's education services were no longer to be provided free of charge no doubt added to the political sensitivities of the individuals likely to be affected.

Even if the Palestinian leadership had decided to convey an accurate appreciation of both the financial realities facing UNRWA and the attitudes of donors to that situation, it would have laid itself open to charges of being part of the wider conspiracy. Arafat appeared determined to avoid such a situation. Moreover, confirming the financial situation facing the agency and demonstrating understanding of the pressures facing donors was not going to produce political results that satisfied the collective aspirations of refugees. Nor would doing so have lessened the material impact upon

refugees of the agency's foreshadowed measures. There was a greater political need instead, for both the Palestinian leadership and the refugees, to uphold the hope that their situation would eventually be rectified. Conspiracy theories helped to sustain that belief in core mythologies.

Palestinian Authority Reactions

The 1997 crisis presented the Palestinian political leadership with clear issues (notably the prospect of school payments) on which to focus its political rhetoric. It was able, with minimal political risk, to demonstrate concern to protect refugee interests. The Palestinian Authority was quick to announce that refugee children should attend classes, that there was no need for fees to be paid, and that Palestinian Authority and PLO officials would resolve the issue of payments with UNRWA. The Palestinian leadership was obliged politically to take a clear position on those issues. It could also be secure in the knowledge that UNRWA, if it was serious about collecting the proposed payments, had no means of enforcing such a decision if the Palestinian Authority would not cooperate.

While the Palestinian leadership was obliged, so far as possible, to demonstrate responsibility and restraint in pressing its concerns, activists within the camps and the teachers union were under less obligation to do so. The critics of the Palestinian leadership were well placed to effect the mobilization of students, especially in UNRWA facilities and youth activities centers, where rejectionist political streams were strongly represented. They had ready-made audiences who could be—and were—assembled and transported directly from classrooms into demonstrations and other protest activity.

Failure to be closely in touch with the popular mood, and to be seen as being as responsive as possible to it, presented a significant risk of political embarrassment for the Palestinian leadership. At the same time, the leadership could not ignore the wider consequences for its relations with the donors, and with UNRWA, if the refugee political reaction grew out of hand. The crisis also unfolded just as the 1997–1998 school year was beginning. That factor lent urgency to the resolution of the situation, for the leadership and rejectionist elements and UNRWA alike. It also helped to increase pressure for an early response from the donors.

In lending a degree of credence, at least initially, to the conspiratorial interpretation of the crisis, the Palestinian leadership sought to highlight the need to defend UNRWA, rather than to criticize it. It did not seek to cast doubt upon the mythologies fundamental to the refugee interpretation of events, but neither did it allow a situation to develop whereby its own record in regard to the upholding of refugee concerns became a major issue. And by responding swiftly and making it clear that it would not be party

to additional financial burdens upon the refugee population, the leadership was able to avoid being outflanked by its critics from within Fatah as well as by rejectionist Palestinian political elements.

The Palestinian leadership managed to avoid any serious embarrassment to its relations with the donors as well. At least partly, it seemed, this was because some of the donors were not fully aware or critically focused—at least in their capitals—on what was happening on the ground. Most seemed largely to ignore what senior Palestinian political figures were saying about the supposed role of donors in the crisis. Leading Palestinian figures were able to be reasonably confident that, if challenged, their own performance could be explained to the donors as representing a wake-up call and the minimum that was politically necessary under the circumstances to maintain their own credibility among the refugee population. The leadership was not in a position to defend the measures announced by UNRWA. Indeed it emphasized consistently that it would defend refugees from the financial burdens that those measures entailed. It was able to say to UNRWA, however, that it remained committed to supporting the agency.

In effect, through taking an active political approach to the crisis, the Palestinian leadership skillfully moved the focus of the Palestinian refugee reaction toward blaming the donor countries for the situation that had arisen. It also discouraged the view that either the leadership or UNRWA itself were parties to a conspiracy against refugee interests. And as noted earlier, it made full use of the willingness among refugees to perceive their situation in terms of a conspiratorial political dynamic, especially among the donor countries, to avoid having to focus on the more challenging issue of whether the traditional role of the agency was in fact financially sustainable.

Riding the wave of public sentiment, Arafat and those around him sought to guide the course of events in both Gaza and the West Bank initially through the Refugee Affairs Department of the PLO, and after 27 August through the formation of a Central Emergency Committee (CEC) in Gaza. Arafat astutely appointed as CEC head the populist Palestinian Authority minister of supply, Abdel Aziz (Abu Ali) Shaheen. A long-standing critic of UNRWA, Shaheen had lambasted the agency for allegedly undermining the sovereignty of the Palestinian Authority and for displaying arrogance in refusing to accept his intervention in the agency's food distribution program earlier in the year. Viewed against the background of the supply minister's modest reputation for competence in handling his portfolio, such attacks on UNRWA had the hallmarks of a diversionary political strategy from the alleged shortcomings of his performance. Nevertheless, Shaheen had a degree of personal political credibility because of his activist role in the youth wing of Fatah during the intifada, and he could be relied

upon by Arafat to avoid exacerbating the situation in ways that Arafat would find unhelpful.

Under Shaheen's leadership, the CEC adhered to the approach taken by the PLO's Department of Refugee Affairs in the West Bank. The establishment of a National Dialogue Secretariat, of which Shaheen was a member and which was representative of all Palestinian factions, further strengthened the role of the department. Shaheen emphasized that the donor countries were to blame for failing to meet their financial obligations, not UNRWA. "UNRWA," he said, "is not a perceived hostile target."[40]

In general, the reaction in the West Bank was the more measured of the two. In contrast to Gaza, UNRWA schools and institutions in the West Bank operated with only token protests, and students in West Bank schools attended classes throughout the crisis. From the outset of the crisis, Camp Committee members in the West Bank had largely gone along with the PLO line urging restraint so far as UNRWA itself was concerned. That was in part a reflection of the level of influence already enjoyed by the Department of Refugee Affairs among that group. It also perhaps reflected the fact that about 50 percent of refugee children in the West Bank attended Palestinian Authority schools anyway and were therefore not disadvantaged by the measures UNRWA was proposing in the education sector.

In Gaza, the decision to boycott UNRWA classes—despite the appeals of the Palestinian Authority's deputy minister for education, Naim Abu Houmous, for students to suspend their strike and go back to classes—had been taken before the creation of the CEC.[41] The People's Committees of Refugee Camps in Gaza Governorates, which was also under the influence of the PLO's Department of Refugee Affairs, had called on 21 August for exchanges of views to establish a working plan to force UNRWA to retract its decisions and continue providing services to all the refugees until the Palestinian problem was "justly solved." The People's Committees noted that the measures UNRWA intended to take were "against the refugees in the Gaza Strip in particular and the other areas in general [and coincided] with the siege imposed by the Israeli Government within a wider conspiracy aiming at humiliating our people."[42]

The People's Committees also announced a program of measures including suspension of study in all UNRWA schools until further notice and until UNRWA retracted its decisions. It foreshadowed sit-ins in UNRWA installations from 26 to 28 August and demonstrations ("massive popular festivals") from 30 August until donors met on 9 September.[43] The communiqué issued by the People's Committees on 22 August (which, underlining the strength of the connection between the two, was released by the PLO's Department of Refugee Affairs) maintained the theme of a conspiracy against the refugees:

> This plot which aims at obstructing the educational process and reducing UNRWA services to the Palestine refugees is considered a serious indication which will affect the future of the Palestinian cause and aims to exercise pressure on the Palestinian people to give further concessions in the coming negotiations. The UN is not satisfied that it helped the establishment of the state of Israel and its prosperity and participated in making the Palestinian exodus, but it also now seeks with malicious insistence to abandon the Palestinian refugees as if their problem were solved. We, in the People's Committees in Gaza Governorates, call on the [Palestinian Authority], headed by Abu Ammar [Yasser Arafat], the international community, and the free international institutions to exercise pressure on UNRWA to meet its commitments until the refugee problem is finally solved. We also call on all national and popular masses to participate in the activities and protest marches which will be organised by the refugee People's Committees to pressure UNRWA to retract its unjust decisions against the Palestinian people.[44]

UNRWA employees followed the trend of popular criticism of the agency and some took the opportunity to promote their personal political status. The chairman of UNRWA's Local Staff Union (LSU), Abdelkarim Joudeh, for example, issued a statement outlining contacts the LSU had maintained with UNRWA management since the news of UNRWA measures. Joudeh said that the "coincidence of UNRWA measures and the Israeli practices puts a big question mark around UNRWA's role in participating in carrying out the policy of pressure and siege on the Palestinian people."[45]

Rejectionist Group Activities

The PLO's Department of Refugee Affairs initially had less political weight among the highly politicized camp committees in Gaza than its rejectionist critics. It was already under fire from Fatah activists opposed to Oslo. In Gaza, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) activists formed the Higher National, Popular, and Islamic Committee to coordinate protest activities outside the PLO framework. Under the heading "No to the Policy of Starvation and Humiliation," the nationalist/Islamist grouping released a statement on 23 August saying that UNRWA had taken "an unjust decision to reduce its services within an international conspiracy against our people and their national rights, for the purpose of ending the refugee issue to serve political objectives." It called on all "national and Islamic groups" to take a firm stand against "this conspiracy which hurts our people's rights and dignity." It supported the decision to suspend study in UNRWA schools until it retracted its decision, and concluded by calling for UNRWA to be preserved—"Make all efforts to foil the project of liquidation

of UNRWA"—without adding markedly to the discussion of practical steps to address the causes of the crisis.[46]

The themes pursued by the nationalist/Islamist grouping were broadly similar to those of the PLO-sponsored People's Committees discussed earlier. And as the PLO was very swift to react to the onset of the crisis, and as its public position also emerged slightly before that of its critics, the PLO leadership was able at least to keep pace politically with the nationalist/Islamist grouping while using the political breathing space thus created to develop a considered response to the situation. Slogans denouncing the cuts signed by Hamas in its own right did not appear in Gaza until 9 September.

Efforts exerted by the Union of Youth Activities Centres (UYAC), traditionally among the most politically active in approach of the non-PLO bodies, and by the Committee to Defend Refugee Rights (launched with fanfare but with little follow-up activity by another PLC Refugee Committee member and prominent figure among refugees around Nablus, Hussam Khader), to create a popular platform outside the influence of the PLO's Department of Refugee Affairs were largely sidelined. Although the UYAC sought to arrange protests, there was little organized protest activity evident in West Bank camps and UNRWA installations.

Later Management of the Crisis

By early September it was clear that the extent and the nature of refugee reactions in both Gaza and the West Bank were generally being decided by the PLO. The Palestinian leadership maintained a dual role throughout the crisis of guiding and promoting protest activities by refugee groups, while at the same time acting to ensure that such protests remained within acceptable limits and posed no serious danger to agency installations or staff. The main area of uncertainty was the likely course of events should the meeting between UNRWA, donors, and host country representatives on 9 September fail to produce additional financial contributions for the agency.

There were relatively few public statements on the political aspects of the crisis by Palestinian Authority and PLO officials other than the head of the PLO's Department of Refugee Affairs, As'ad Abdel Rahman, and Radio and TV Palestine. As in the early stage of the crisis, As'ad Abdel Rahman attributed the budget deficit to the dereliction of Western and Arab donors since the Madrid conference of 1991. He said that some donor states had refrained from providing promised funding for UNRWA in order to reduce its role gradually. That, he said, was to the benefit of Israel and affected the final status negotiations on refugees.[47]

As'ad Abdel Rahman also argued that the protests of refugee committees, which he insisted were partly spontaneous and partly coordinated by the PLO, should have been welcomed by UNRWA because they would help

the agency in its fundraising efforts with the donor states. He said the PLO had no solution except broadening the donor base for the agency and appealing to existing donors to increase their contributions. Asked if the Palestinian Authority would take over UNRWA schools if the situation deteriorated, As'ad Abdel Rahman said that the Palestinian Authority would not assume the functions of any UNRWA installations so long as there was no just and permanent solution to the refugee problem. For any party to do so would be, he said, "an act of treachery."[48]

Both Arafat and As'ad Abdel Rahman said they would contact representatives of the donor countries and urge them to meet their financial commitments to UNRWA.[49] Both highlighted their concern over the introduction of the measures at a time when the Palestinian population was suffering severe economic difficulties and the effects of a prolonged closure.[50]

A variation later developed on that argument, to the effect that UNRWA was becoming a tool of the major donors (that is, the United States) and was being used for political ends. Rather than being attacked for this, the agency therefore needed to be protected and supported as the symbolic and actual articulation of refugee rights. Its property and installations, accordingly, were not to be vandalized or destroyed during protest activities. The theme of UNRWA as the victim of a donor-driven political agenda was expressed with particular eloquence by Ali al-Jarbawi, head of the Department of Political Science at Bir Zeit University and a noted columnist. Al-Jarbawi argued:

> [Our] arrows should be directed at the donor states and not at UNRWA, since it is the organisation that receives funding and it is not the source of the funding to the refugees. . . . We and UNRWA should work together to expose the political reasons behind the reductions in services. . . . While it is our duty to support the Agency due to its international character and dimensions, the continuation and improvement in its services should not be the sole responsibility of the Palestinian people. . . . We must be equally careful that this does not become an Arab responsibility by constantly asking the Arab states to increase their contributions to UNRWA's budget. . . . If the Arab states start playing that role, soon they will be asked to find an Arab solution to the Palestinian refugee problem [which] is what Israel always proposed and worked for, supported by certain Western states. . . . The Palestinian issue remains in all its aspects an international issue for the international community to find a solution to, and in a fashion acceptable to the Palestinians themselves.[51]

By early September, following intensive lobbying by the PLO's Department of Refugee Affairs, the tone of commentary from Radio and TV Palestine tended to focus increasingly on lamenting UNRWA cuts, calling on traditional and Arab donors to increase their contributions, and highlighting the Palestinian Authority's role in efforts to solve UNRWA's financial problems.

While coverage continued to be given to conspiracy theories, media comment focused mostly on the need to defend the agency for both political and humanitarian reasons.

The PLC's Refugee Committee also increasingly reflected the Palestinian leadership line that criticism of the measures announced by UNRWA should not be directed at the agency, but rather at the donor countries. The PLO-orchestrated protest activities and statements had effectively averted any possible discussion about change rather than continuity, and had channeled popular debate mostly into a discussion about the importance of supporting UNRWA, an area where the Palestinian leadership was quite comfortable about defending its record. Following the announcement of additional assistance for UNRWA by the donor countries at the meeting in Amman on 9 September, and the news that UNRWA was not going to proceed with the possible measures it had foreshadowed in regard to education and hospitalization services, the UNRWA issue virtually disappeared from the Palestinian political agenda and media.

Outcomes and Lessons of the 1997 Crisis

The events of 1997 were remarkable on several counts. The crisis showed how refugee perceptions were linked directly to underlying issues of identity and a fierce concern for the preservation of aspirations, notions of equity, and resistance to what was perceived to be a step toward an imposed, unbalanced outcome to the refugee issue. There was an overwhelming predisposition among the Palestinian refugees to see the crisis as a manifestation of plans by the United States and other donors, with the presumed support of the Palestinian Authority and Israel, to force the refugees to accept the limitations inherent in the Oslo framework. A conviction that the Western donors, and possibly UNRWA itself, had specific political objectives in mind for the refugees remained central to Palestinian refugee perceptions of the crisis.

The Palestinian leadership made effective use of the willingness among refugees to perceive the crisis situation as a conspiracy, thereby positioning itself to ride out the crisis largely unscathed. The mythologies of the refugees, including those concerning the responsibilities of the donor countries, were used by Palestinian political leaders, especially during the early stages of the crisis, to explain or to legitimize their own position, rather than to risk losing the political initiative to their critics. The possibility of constructive change in UNRWA's approach, in order to improve its financial sustainability, was not seriously contemplated by the Palestinian political leadership.

In taking that approach, and through responding firmly to the perceived threat, the Palestinian leadership reinforced the mythologies of the refugees

and added to the rigidities of the political environment surrounding the agency. An opportunity existed for the Palestinian leadership to communicate to its popular audience the fact that UNRWA would need to change its approach in some respects in order to preserve its financial viability. It could have focused on the need to engage constructively with the donors to secure, at a minimum, the protection of the most vulnerable of the refugee population from added financial pressures on the agency. Instead, the Palestinian Authority chose to give priority to upholding refugee concerns to preserve their perceived rights, and to supporting refugee aspirations to maintain their distinctive identity among other Palestinians, as well as within those countries hosting the majority of their number.

The 1997 crisis demonstrated that there were bodies with larger interests at stake in preserving, rather than in changing, the political and mythological status quo so far as the refugee issue and the role of UNRWA was concerned. It proved possible for most of the key parties to use mythologies, the impact of perceptions among refugees of external parties, and the imagery of the refugee situation so effectively that a need to create alternative refugee mythologies was never felt.

The politically expedient course that was adopted in 1997 by all sides overlooked the issue of the sustainability of that approach in the absence of a resolution of the refugee question. The donor countries, for their part, failed to outline effectively the facts of the financial situation facing UNRWA, or to set out a coherent position so far as their approach to the Palestinian refugee issue was concerned. Instead, refugee mythologies that were fundamentally opposed to change were allowed to dominate discourse on the refugee issue and UNRWA, thereby inviting stasis.

The outcomes of the 1997 crisis showed refugees that it was still possible to bring about sufficient pressure upon the donor community to secure the increases in donor financial support for the agency that they believed should be provided to a growing refugee population as a matter of right. That did not, however, secure their future, or that of UNRWA. Refugee mythology—including certain assumptions about the obligations and commitment of the international community to upholding refugee interests—may have been validated by the outcomes of the crisis, but only the symptoms of the underlying problems from which the financial crisis arose were treated.

UNRWA emerged from 1997 with its underlying financial problems still far from resolved, but with its own political culture and priorities virtually unchanged. In doing so, UNRWA demonstrated its skills in managing donor perceptions and its relations with both host country governments and refugees. It did not take up the more politically demanding challenge of coming fully to grips with its financial dilemmas through prioritization of agency functions, or seeking to shift a larger portion of its recurrent costs onto the Palestinian Authority.

The end result of the crisis was the continuation, in all essential respects, of the status quo. The injection of additional financial support from Western donor governments meant that existing policy approaches by UNRWA remained essentially unchanged. By mid-1998, the agency's financial situation was again precarious, with the agency advising donor countries that it faced a core deficit in funding for its regular budget of $21 million for 1998 and a cash shortfall of $17 million in the third quarter of that year.[52]

The apparently irreconcilable differences between the perceptions of the agency's role and responsibilities among refugees, Western donor governments, Arab donor governments, host governments, and the agency's management were not addressed. The causes of the financial crisis were identified by the agency, but the remedies that could have been suggested were left mostly unthought of. It suited a range of interests, and refugee mythologies, for that to be the case.

Conclusion: Institutions, Structures, and Agents in the Refugee Context

The 1997 financial crisis in UNRWA provided some interesting insights into the complex relationship in the Palestinian context between UNRWA as an institution, Palestinian mythologies as structural issues, and agents and circumstances of change. The UNRWA crisis had a quantifiable, empirically verifiable basis. The reasons for the crisis were, above all else, the growing gap between the rate of increase of donor contributions to UNRWA, on the one hand, and the rate of growth of the registered Palestinian refugee population, on the other, and the agency's determination to continue to provide—as far as possible—equivalent levels of service to all registered refugees seeking them.

The crisis was devoid of the sorts of political agendas on the part of UNRWA or the donor countries that were ascribed to those parties by elements among the refugee population. In fact, UNRWA and the donor countries each had their own, quite distinctive concerns, which manifested themselves in ways that helped, on balance, to maintain the agency on its precrisis policy trajectory.

UNRWA was committed to modernizing its management systems and broadening its base of donor support. UNRWA's approach was basically shaped, however, toward continuity rather than change through a combination of political circumstances, UN institutional factors, and a commitment to fulfilling what the agency saw as its appropriate role. That role included seeking to have other parties provide levels of financial support for UNRWA that were commensurate with the affirmations of support that they

regularly provided at the political level in the UN General Assembly, when UNRWA was discussed.

UNRWA was, therefore, more than an extension of the UN General Assembly, which established it in 1949. It was not simply an instrument of the donor countries either. It was an actor, with its own identity, actively engaged in shaping perceptions of the political environment insofar as it saw that doing so among the donor countries enhanced its capacity to fulfill its mandate. When its financial circumstances approached the crisis point, UNRWA found that instead of rethinking its strategic approach, it could turn, as in previous years, to political pressure upon the Western donor community to secure the financial relief it required. Although the Gulf Arab states were largely unmoved by the crisis, when UNRWA focused among its Western interlocutors on the political context and perceived consequences of changing its approach under duress, it assessed, correctly, that it had a stronger hand to play than did the Western donor countries.

There is another important sense in which UNRWA had a life of its own, which the 1997 crisis highlighted. Its symbolism among Palestinian refugees had given it, over time, an ascribed importance among their mythologies that had radically altered its original normative basis as an institution intended to alleviate distress through public works and temporary humanitarian relief programs. As Martha Finnemore found in regard to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), this normative change did not come about as the result of the conscious decisions of an individual or individuals to promote change.[53] The dynamic that drove change in UNRWA's self-perception was its acceptance that whereas the agency could not act without upholding its formal responsibilities as a UN body, neither could it ignore the political consequences of its actions. To deliver its mandated functions, UNRWA was obliged in practice to take account of the impact of its actions on refugee perceptions and their expectations of the agency as part of their sense of identity.

The UNRWA crisis of 1997 underlined the fact that perceptions rooted in Palestinian refugee mythologies, including about donor objectives, are difficult to change at the popular level. In 1997, even among well-educated and sophisticated interlocutors, let alone among the vast majority of refugees, tackling the imagery of conspiracy was not seen as necessary, or even appropriate, by the Palestinian Authority or by UNRWA. Beneath its identity as a UN institution lay the political facts with which UNRWA had to contend, and of which it was a part. Where in response to the crisis there were calls for change in UNRWA's approach, these were almost entirely limited to a handful of Western donor countries. Such calls were not articulated in public fora, and donors as a group did nothing to dispel or amend core refugee mythologies. Ironically, if the donors had articulated ideas for reform in UNRWA, they would probably have reinforced refugee concerns.

The 1997 crisis showed that to treat Palestinian refugee mythologies as irrelevant, either to the pursuit of the Palestinian nationalist agenda or to the future of UNRWA, would be unwise, if not politically untenable. It demonstrated that if they were to be undertaken as a deliberate policy, strategies for change in UNRWA would have to be designed to address refugee insistence on their distinctiveness within the Palestinian situation generally, and on their special status as a responsibility of the international community, rather than the Palestinian Authority. The challenge of presenting alternative mythologies was bound to be increased where material benefits from existing mythologies were significant, unless it could be shown that those benefits could be preserved in some way. And the principle of ongoing international responsibility for their support, which was directly linked to refugee mythology, was no more likely to be formally abandoned by the refugees than other claims central to the framing of Palestinian national identity.

Notes

1. UN Security Council Resolution 237 dealt with the return of Palestinians displaced by the 1967 war.

2. Governments contributing U.S.$1 million or more are referred to in UNRWA as "major donors." In 1997 the eleven leading donor countries (including project funding as well as contributions to UNRWA's regular budget) were the United States $84.7 million; European Union $57.5 million; Japan $28.6 million; Sweden $18.8 million; Norway $14.0 million; Denmark $13.6 million; United Kingdom $10.7 million; the Netherlands $9.4 million; Germany $8.4 million; Switzerland $7.6 million; and Canada $7.6 million. Palestine Refugee ResearchNet, "The 1997 UNRWA Donor Generosity Index," *FOFOGNET Digest,* 30 December 1998. Other major donors included France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, and Saudi Arabia. Australia ranked fifteenth, with a contribution of $2.04 million.

3. Robert Bowker, *Beyond Peace: The Search for Security in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996), p. 6.

4. Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 274.

5. Although the United States has abstained in recent years on the main UN resolutions dealing with UNRWA, in response to congressional pressures it has remained the largest single financial donor to the agency (contributing about $89 million in 2000).

6. Randa Farah, "Crossing Boundaries: Reconstruction of Palestinian Identities in Al-Baq'a Refugee Camp, Jordan," in Riccardo Bocco, Blandine Destremau, and Jean Hannoyer, eds., *Palestine, Palestiniens: Territoire national, espaces communautaires* (Amman: Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain [CERMOC)], 1997), pp. 291–294.

7. United Nations, *UNGA Fourth Committee Press Release,* GA/SPD/125, 21st Meeting (AM), 24 November 1997. See also United Nations, *Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine*

Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 1997–30 June 1998, General Assembly Official Records (GAOR), 53rd sess., supp. 13 (A/53/13), para. 82; and *UNRWA News* no. 349, UNRWA Headquarters Vienna, 2 October 1996.

8. UN GAOR A/53/13, para. 84.

9. Informal meeting of host governments and major donors, Amman, 10–11 June 1997, final document, p. 4, par. 20. From unclassified correspondence released to the author by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra.

10. The overall occupancy rate of agency schools was 42.5 students per class in 1996, but in Gaza 60 percent of classes had occupancy rates of over 48 students; 16 percent of agency schools were in rented premises, with classrooms too small to take increased classes; 479 of the total of 643 agency schools were double-shifted. Figures provided by Field Education Office, UNRWA West Bank Field Office, Jerusalem.

11. In 1997 UNRWA claimed it had an average number of patient visits per doctor per day in Gaza of 118; for the West Bank the figure reported was 89. The average for the agency was 100. UNRWA, *UNRWA Fact Sheet,* UNRWA Headquarters Gaza, Public Information Office, June 1997.

12. In March 1998 UNRWA confirmed the approach it had taken in the previous two years of relying on contract teachers to meet teacher requirements, an approach that effectively halved the cost per teacher. UNRWA, *UNRWA's Current Financial Situation and Funding Priorities for 1998: Briefing Paper Prepared for the Informal Meeting of Major Donors and Host Governments, Amman, 28 May 1998,* UNRWA Headquarters Gaza, 11 May 1998, p. 2. From unclassified correspondence released to the author by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra.

13. UNRWA, "UNRWA Forced to Make Cuts," Press Release, UNRWA Headquarters Gaza, Public Information Office, 19 August 1997. See also United Nations, *Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 1996–30 June 1997* GAOR, 52nd sess., supp. 13 (A/52/13), p. 5, para. 16; and UN GAOR A/53/13, pp. 1–4.

14. UNRWA, "UNRWA Forced to Make Cuts."

15. UNRWA, Press Briefing Notes, 10 September 1997, p. 3.

16. The controversy is dealt with fairly briefly in UNRWA's annual report of 1997–1998. See UN GAOR A/53/13, esp. pp. 1–4.

17. By June 1998 the agency was awaiting reimbursement by the Palestinian Authority of payments made by UNRWA against value-added tax and port and related charges that had a cumulative value of $19 million. UN GAOR A/53/13, p. 5.

18. UNRWA, "UNRWA Forced to Make Cuts."

19. Letter from UNRWA Commissioner-General to major donors, 14 August 1997. From unclassified correspondence released to the author by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra.

20. United Nations Information Service, *Press Conference by Commissioner-General of UNRWA,* Geneva, 26 August 1997.

21. The centerpiece of that process was a Business Process Review prepared for UNRWA in December 1996 by Arthur Andersen and Co. The report, focusing on procurement and inventory management, budgeting and financial systems, human resources management, and management information systems, was developed in conjunction with recommendations made in a separate review of the relocation and reorganization of UNRWA headquarters undertaken by John Rhodes.

22. Background to the European Gaza Hospital is provided in UN GAOR A/52/13, pp. 62–63; and its equivalent for 1997–1998, UN GAOR A/53/13, p. 42.

UN GAOR A/53/13, p. 42, para. 214, refers delicately to "substantial progress in resolving outstanding issues relating to funding shortfalls" by the tripartite European Gaza Hospital project board.

23. Graham Usher, "The Ongoing Demise of UNRWA," *Al-Ahram Weekly,* 4–10 November 1999.

24. Ibid.

25. UNRWA, *Expansion of UNRWA's Traditional Donor Base: Briefing Paper Prepared for the Informal Meeting of Major Donors and Host Governments, Amman, 10–11 June 1997,* UNRWA Headquarters Gaza. Efforts extended to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei to discuss the role they could play and to present proposals for funding. The agency also sought to obtain the active diplomatic support of the Gulf states for UNRWA in a number of regional and international bodies, such as the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Gulf Cooperation Council, with a view to reinforcing its claims for international support and, where resources existed, to pursue them through such bodies.

26. Rex Brynen, *Financing Palestinian Refugee Compensation,* paper presented at the Palestinian Refugee ResearchNet and International Development Research Centre (PRRN/IDRC) workshop on "Compensation as Part of a Comprehensive Solution to the Palestinian Refugee Problem," Ottawa, 14–15 July 1999, *FOFOGNET Digest* 6 November 1999, p. 8.

27. The Commissioner-General's visit to the United Arab Emirates in 1997 was preceded within a few days by separate visits seeking funding by Faisal Husseini, the minister responsible for Jerusalem affairs in the Palestinian Authority; and Farouk Kaddoumi, the PLO's "foreign minister."

28. *Al-Dustour,* 27 July 1997.

29. *Daily Star* (Beirut), 28 August 1997.

30. *Daily Star,* 3 September 1997.

31. *Jordan Times,* 27 August 1997.

32. *Jordan Times,* 4–5 September 1997.

33. A. (Lex) Takkenberg's authoritative study of the status of Palestinians under international refugee law makes it clear that such a view of the role of the UNHCR is misplaced. According to Takkenberg, the protection function of the UNHCR seeks to ensure that refugees are identified and accorded an appropriate status and standard of treatment in their countries of asylum, and to ensure with and through national authorities the safety and well-being of refugee groups and individuals in asylum countries. The protection function also includes promoting measures to remove or attenuate the causes of refugee flight so as to establish conditions that would permit refugees to return safely to their homes and, when this becomes feasible, facilitating, assisting, and monitoring the safety of voluntary repatriation. If safe return is not possible, it involves "promoting and implementing the other durable solutions of resettlement or local integration." A. (Lex) Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 304.

34. *Tishreen,* 4 September 1997.

35. *Jordan Times,* 27 and 29 August 1997; *Al-Quds,* 28 August 1997. The involvement of political aspirants was, in a sense, a departure from the tendency before 1997 for opinion in refugee camps in Jordan to be represented largely by self-appointed "notables."

36. The full economic impact of the closures of August–September 1997 is outlined in United Nations, *Office of the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO) and the World Bank Closure on the West Bank and Gaza Fact Sheet,*

8 September 1997. See also UNRWA, *Information Update,* 11 August 1997, on the same issue.

37. UN GAOR A/53/13, p. 2.

38. The chairman of the Conference of UNRWA Staff Committees had written to the then Commissioner-General on 2 October 1973 that the critical financial deficit confronting the agency that year was "nothing but a mere fabricated or concocted pretext for political aims." Cited in Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation,* p. 111.

39. Typical among stories of this nature was "Musalsal al-a'jz al-mufta'al fi muwazina wakalat al-ghuth muhawala al-tafaf a'la' al-qadaya al-falastiniyya" (The ongoing [soap opera] fabricated deficit in the [UNRWA] budget [is] an attempt to spit on the Palestinian cause), *Al-Arab al-Youm,* 28 August 1997.

40. *Al-Hayyat,* 30 August 1997.

41. *Al-Ayyam,* 28 August 1997; *Jerusalem Times,* 29 August 1997.

42. People's Committees for Refugee Camps in the Gaza Governorate, "Bernamij muwajamatan istaqataa'at wakalat al-ghuth al-dowliyya al-akhira" ([A] program for countering the recent cuts to [UNRWA]), Press Release, 21 August 1997. The circular concludes, "Together for the sake of return, self determination and the establishment of the independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem independent as its capital."

43. Ibid.

44. Communiqué issued by the People's Committees of Refugee Camps in Gaza Governorates, 22 August 1997. The communiqué was almost totally erroneous in its listing of actions supposedly undertaken or intended by the agency.

45. Abdelkarim Joudeh, "Taharrukat ittihad al-muwathafeen al-arab howla ijra'at wakalat al-ghuth al-dowliyya" (Activity of the Union of Arab Employees against the measures of [UNRWA]), UNRWA Local Staff Union, 21 August 1997.

46. Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), DFLP, and PFLP, "La li-siyasat al-tajwiyya' wa al-tarkiyya'" (No to the policy of starvation and subjugation/humiliation), Joint Press Release, Gaza, 23 August 1997.

47. *Al-Resalah,* 21 August 1997; *Al-Ayyam,* 21 August 1997.

48. *Al-Resalah,* 21 August 1997; *Al-Ayyam,* 25 August 1997.

49. *Al-Ayyam,* 20 August 1997.

50. Ibid.

51. Ali al-Jarbawi, "Ala' min yajib al nutliq al-siham?" (Against whom should we aim our arrows?), opinion column in *Al-Ayyam,* 30 August 1997, and in *Al-Rai,* 1 September 1997.

52. UNRWA, *UNRWA's Current Financial Situation and Funding Priorities for 1998,* p. 1. The agency avoided a further emergency, however, because of additional contributions announced by some donors in the course of 1998 and ongoing cost controls; a cash flow crisis was overcome by delaying payments to contractors and suppliers and a temporary loan of $3 million from the Income Generation Programme. *UNRWA's Financial Situation: 1998 Performance and 1999 Forecast—Briefing Paper Prepared for the Informal Meeting of Major Donors and Host Authorities,* Amman, 1 February 1999, p. 2. From unclassified correspondence released to the author by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra.

53. Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 37.

8

Mythology, Identity, and the Future

Palestinians view the "refugee problem" as the heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict, the anchor of their memory and political motivation. . . . Any settlement which does not directly address this problem is therefore inconceivable. . . . On the other hand, it is equally inconceivable that Israel will agree to the return of Palestinians to their original homes or those of their parents, even in the context of a peaceful settlement. To do so would be to undermine the Jewish character of the state—i.e. to contradict Israel's very raison d'être. *A settlement is therefore possible only if the Palestinians can somehow transcend almost completely the central reference point in their national memory and instead focus on replacing a tragic past with a hopeful future. How can this be done?*

—Mark A. Heller and Sari Nusseibeh, *No Trumpets, No Drums*

Give birth to me again
Give birth to me that I may know
In which land I will die, in which land I will come to life again.

—Mahmoud Darwish, "Some Roses Less (Wardun Akaal)," 1986

This book has focused on how the relationship between power, perceptions, and communication of memories and mythologies affects political decisionmaking in the context of the Palestinian refugee issue. Through an extended examination of the dynamics of Palestinian political culture, and through analysis of responses to the 1997 financial crisis in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the book has discussed the implications of contested mythologies for the management of the refugee issue in the broader context of the Middle East peace process.

Two core questions that have been raised are whether political mythologies, in the Palestinian refugee context at least, are susceptible to change or to being overtaken by new priorities; and whether such mythologies can coexist with approaches that, in important respects, seek to ignore or to contradict them. With those questions in mind, this concluding chap-

ter will review the main elements of the preceding discussion. It will then consider the implications of that assessment for the future, and possible ways to proceed.

Memories, Mythologies, and Politics

The connection I have outlined between Palestinian refugee memories and mythologies and political decisions in the Palestinian context is complex. Mythologies are an integral and defining element of Palestinian society and Palestinian political culture, including the imagined community of Palestinian refugees. As was underlined by the discussion of political developments in the 1990s and the 1997 crisis in UNRWA, perceptions embedded in the political culture, ideas, and values of refugee political mythologies affect the calculus and processes of Palestinian political behavior.

The importance of mythologies should not be overstated. When one considers the factors that drive governments both strategically and on a daily basis, there is a difference in impact between factors such as political mythologies, which shape perceptions and often constrain policy choices somewhat intangibly, and more hard-edged concerns. Palestinian (and Israeli) policies are determined in the push and shove and hard bargaining of a highly political environment. Government decisions are shaped by the influence of key personalities and their abilities and intuition, as well as by societal and cultural values and attitudes. Palestinian policy directions have been subject to strategic shocks and discontinuities—such as the rise of Tanzim—largely unrelated to refugee mythologies. Even without taking mythologies into account, the factors mentioned above have made authoritative interpretation of Palestinian affairs a challenging business.

Nevertheless, there are significant interactions much of the time between Palestinian mythologies and political behavior. During the 1990s, as well as during the events of 1997, the political mythologies and memories that provide the basis of identity and aspirations of Palestinian refugees were a benchmark of political legitimacy in the Palestinian context. The imbalance of power in Israel's favor added to feelings among ordinary Palestinian refugees of suspicion, frustration, and defiance. Refugees were wary of developments that were presumed to be linked ultimately to conspiracies to determine their fate through the Oslo peace process.

Those reactions were shaped, in turn, by the cultural and historical framework or collective memory through which Israeli and Western actions were perceived. The objective issues that the Palestinian leadership confronted, including in regard to UNRWA, were interwoven with folk mythologies of collective historical memories and dreams of redress, with ongoing negative experiences of interaction with Israelis, and with a complex set of

assumptions and beliefs about themselves as refugees that together have helped to shape the modern Palestinian refugee identity.[1] Political imagery linked to personal experiences, emotions, and real or imagined collective memories had strong emotional significance. Mythologies that provided comfort at the individual level received organized political support. In contrast, facts and issues as observed from greater critical distance by Western countries—such as the financial viability of UNRWA—barely entered the Palestinian political debate.

Throughout the 1990s refugee mythology provided a framework for anchoring the past, and by extension the legitimacy of refugee political aspirations. Upholding the consistency of political mythologies and imagery mattered deeply to the personal identity and self-esteem of many individual Palestinian refugees. It affirmed the principle of entitlement to redress, including the right to return, not to a Palestinian state created in parts of the West Bank and Gaza, but to Israel proper. There was little prospect of changing refugee mythologies without changes occurring in the power structures—both societal and political—through which those mythologies were conveyed and perpetuated, and changes in the experiences that served to strengthen or reaffirm those mythologies.

The Palestinian leadership, for its part, had nothing new or better to offer its refugee audience as an alternative vision for their future, because the core factors shaping refugee mythology to that point were essentially devoid of such changes. By the late 1990s the Oslo peace process, viewed with deep misgivings among the Palestinian refugees in any event, was virtually at a standstill. Refugees were suffering the same indignities as before, and a deteriorating economic situation. The Palestinian leadership was increasingly estranged from the Palestinian population as a whole. Apart from its prospective material impact upon their well-being, to many refugees the most worrying aspect of the financial crisis in UNRWA was that it could be placed in the context of concerns about conspiracies against the refugee cause.

The gap that existed between the refugees and the Palestinian leadership over their respective aims and interests was not the only one involved. The international community was also unwilling to acknowledge openly, let alone to address, the facts of political life that it believed would have to apply to the refugee situation in terms of the peace process. Donor countries continued to provide substantial humanitarian support to the refugees, mainly through UNRWA. The donors reaffirmed without serious debate the ongoing role of the agency. They did so, however, without questioning the relevance of UNRWA's role *as perceived by the refugees,* or considering the implications for the peace process of sustaining refugee mythologies more or less unchanged. Whether donor countries did so for well-considered humanitarian and political reasons, or because supporting UNRWA was

simply an attractive means of delivering support to the Palestinians in an accountable and noncontroversial manner, the countries that provided financial support to UNRWA reinforced refugee mythology concerning their rights and the responsibility of the international community to support them.

The potency of the tensions on the Palestinian side was magnified by the complex relationship between the refugees and the donor community. The presumed agendas of external parties provided a rallying point for refugees opposing change, however justifiable or necessary changes might have appeared to some of the Western donor countries. For their part, Western donor countries led by the United States were held historically and morally responsible by the refugees and the Palestinian leadership for their plight. They also failed to produce alternative visions for the refugees and for the future of the agency that offered levels of political-psychological and material comfort comparable to existing refugee mythologies. Nor did the donor countries take the opportunity to shape UNRWA's approach in a way that might more closely have reflected the financial realities facing the agency. They simply met its financial shortfalls.

Arab donor countries did not appear to share concerns among Western donor countries to avoid allowing crises over UNRWA to undermine the political credibility of the Palestinian Authority in the wider context of the peace process. Throughout the Oslo period, Arab donor countries privately held a negative view of the Palestinian Authority and its political orientation. Though Arab donor countries were consistently superior to most Western donors in their overall financial support for UNRWA, political opinion in those countries was instinctively associated with popular Palestinian mythologies and was reluctant to endorse the approach to Israel taken by the Palestinian leadership. Opinion within the wider Arab world insisted that the refugee issue was the moral responsibility of key Western countries to resolve, and one that should remain an international rather than an Arab issue.

UNRWA

The UNRWA financial crisis of 1997 highlighted substantial gaps in communication between refugees, the Palestinian Authority, external parties, and UNRWA. It also showed that bringing about durable change in attitude toward UNRWA by design, rather than by default, would require far-reaching measures within refugee societies that were already severely stressed. The deliberate introduction of change in UNRWA, if it were to come about, would have to be initiated and shaped in the political arena. In that context, moreover, it was shown that changes to established narratives would be firmly contested where they were perceived to flow from external pressures.

Placing UNRWA on a more sustainable basis through some donors' preferred approach—prioritization among its functions—was bound to be

problematic while the refugee issue remained unresolved with Israel, at least so far as the refugees themselves were concerned. Where prospective changes were perceived to be contrary to the values, rights, and beliefs of the wider society, or peer groups within refugee society, such changes would be contested equally firmly whether they originated with the Palestinian leadership or with external parties. Disparities of power would continue to affect refugee perceptions of the motives and credibility of those proposing change.

The events of 1997 showed there was clearly some way to go before UNRWA and the international community would be able to deal constructively with the issues surrounding the future of the agency. Looking to the future, changes in approach on UNRWA's part seemed less likely to arise as a result of policy decisions by the agency senior management, donors, or other parties, than as an outcome of an inevitable decline in the capacity of the agency to service refugee demands when the emergency conditions that have applied since the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifada in late 2000 eased.

Whether change in respect of UNRWA came about through developments in the peace process, or demographic pressures, or the emergence of higher priorities elsewhere for the international community, the political and humanitarian outlook for the Palestinian refugees was increasingly problematic. By mid-2003, a comprehensive solution to the refugee issue was not in sight. Indeed the economic and human costs of the second intifada had reinforced the relevance of UNRWA's original rationale, as expressed in UN Resolution 302 (IV), to avoid starvation and distress among the refugees and to contribute to regional security and stability. The importance attached by Palestinian refugees to the symbolism of UNRWA's existence and to its practical assistance and presence in their lives had not diminished either.

The uncertainty that surrounds the outlook for future peace negotiations could continue for several years. That has already, in turn, underlined the need for ongoing financial support to UNRWA. The crisis confronting refugees in the West Bank and Gaza since September 2000 has also galvanized fresh funding for the agency from traditional donors. Most major donors have indicated that they are prepared to maintain their support for the refugees. The perceptions and interests that have led donor decision-makers to sustain their financial support until now have not altered.

In the short term it is virtually impossible to explore various possible scenarios for the evolution of UNRWA and its role in the refugee issue. The emergency situation of refugees in Gaza and the West Bank since late 2000 has strengthened the status quo. It has improved UNRWA's capacity to raise additional funding. The agency has a key role to play concerning emergency relief measures, including short-term employment, housing, and food aid. The extensive damage that has been caused to the institutions of the Palestinian Authority make it even more essential for UNRWA to deliver its own services.

Demographic pressures dictate, however, that viable answers to the financial challenges facing the agency will have to be found, irrespective of the degree of progress achieved in peace negotiations and associated concerns regarding the refugee issue. While it is important to recognize the strength of the political and practical factors favoring continuation of the status quo so far as UNRWA is concerned, defending the status quo will not secure the agency's future under changing regional circumstances. Determined efforts to refocus the agency in sustainable directions would be preferable to approaches that, through failure to address the political mythologies surrounding UNRWA in a coherent way, inevitably come to see the preservation of the status quo for UNRWA as an end in itself.

UNRWA therefore needs to demonstrate willingness to adapt its methods of delivering humanitarian support while still fulfilling intangible but real and important refugee needs that go beyond material assistance. It needs to convince the donor countries—the ultimate issue as far as the viability of the agency is concerned—that it is prepared to initiate creative and positive approaches that do not lose contact with the needs and demands of Palestinian refugees, but that overall meet the objectives of donors sufficiently to warrant their ongoing support. Ultimately, building an agency characterized by responsiveness to change, but with predictability and the capacity to preserve core functions, would be the approach most likely to serve the interests of refugees and host governments, as well as the donor countries.

Instead of delivering its own programs, UNRWA should seek to become a service manager and center of excellence. It should maintain, for political reasons, an effective UN presence in the lives of the refugees and underline the commitment of the international community to supporting them until their situation is resolved. Its approach should not disadvantage the refugees who need its material support most. At the same time, however, it should also strengthen Palestinian national capacities and put them on a more sustainable basis by allowing Palestinian national institutions and nongovernmental organizations to play a growing part in the services provided by the agency.

The present approach of UNRWA, which is derived from an assumption that it should deliver services itself, is unsustainable financially. It is out of step with the direction of government philosophy and practice in many donor countries. It does not take adequate account of the potential for government and Palestinian community-based bodies to undertake a larger share of those functions, should there be a return to the state-building process seen in the mid-1990s. The present approach of the agency also avoids the issue of the longer-term need for those functions to be managed by Palestinians themselves on a financially sound basis.

It is important for UNRWA and the donor countries to avoid being drawn into diversionary debates with each other about the feasibility of new economy measures. Savings, if they can be found at all after years of austerity, could only be very minor in comparison to the overall financial situation facing the agency. The possibility of some evolution in UNRWA's education, health, and social services programs (as distinct from its methods of delivery of those programs) should not be ruled out, but radical changes in the general content of those core programs are not in prospect.

So long as a comprehensive formal and agreed solution to the refugee issue is not in sight, the importance attached by Palestinians in the diaspora to the symbolism of UNRWA's presence will not diminish. Outside Gaza and the West Bank, suggestions of change in the agency's approach would be likely to produce such apprehension, and such adverse political reactions, both among refugees and from the host countries themselves, that the agency's capacity to carry out its primary responsibilities would be endangered. Only in the West Bank and Gaza, for the moment, is there at least the capacity for discussion and the possibility of acceptance of alternative approaches. Even that would be politically very difficult.

Central to achieving a satisfactory outcome would be a consultative, coherent, and targeted approach to the agency's dealings with the Palestinian leadership, and the protection of the refugees from additional financial or other burdens that would in turn make building political support for change even more problematic than at present. For that reason, any changes in approach should not encompass movement toward cost recovery, as was hinted at by the agency in 1997. There may be only limited value in pursuing such an approach, even under ideal conditions, in regard to public health and primary education. To raise the cost-recovery issue under any foreseeable political conditions in the West Bank and Gaza would be to eliminate any real prospect of gathering the political momentum for other changes in approach that are ultimately more important to the agency's long-term interests.

The political management of movement toward an approach in which UNRWA becomes more a manager and less a participant in delivering programs for refugees will be especially sensitive so far as UNRWA's relations with the Palestinian Authority or any successor body are concerned. All but the most minor changes of approach on UNRWA's part are capable of being interpreted by refugees and host governments as the agency phasing out its services, rather than meeting the challenge of bridging the gap between income and needs. Many Palestinians, the Palestinian leadership, and most host governments would insist that the main problem confronting UNRWA was not donor fatigue, but political agendas aimed at prematurely closing the page on the refugee problem by winding down the role of the agency.

The Palestinian leadership will need further support if it is to be in a position to assume its responsibilities in due course for all Palestinians. It would be critically important for the agency's approach to present a package supported by donors from which Palestinian national institutions would derive advantages overall, provided the Palestinian leadership was prepared to work positively and constructively with the agency.

Selling the package would require serious engagement on the substantive issues at the most senior Palestinian political levels. On the one hand, there would need to be an unambiguous demonstration to the Palestinian leadership of the untenability of the agency's financial situation and firmness about the need for change in its approach. On the other hand, there would need to be an emphasis on the shared benefits of cooperation. The agency, and donors that were genuinely concerned about the sustainability of UNRWA programs, would need to attach high priority to undertaking thorough preparatory work with the Palestinian leadership, and at operational levels. They would also need to keep the host countries fully informed and seek their backing.

The timing of change would also need careful consideration. And misplaced perceptions about donor objectives are likely to remain deeply rooted in myths that are more comfortable to live with than the cruelly mundane realities of donor decisionmaking. Tackling such negative imagery would be even more problematic unless the peace process appeared to be moving forward, with the prospect of something tangible flowing to the refugees from it.

A balance has to be maintained between the pace of reform and these political constraints. But accommodating political sensitivities cannot substitute for finding the means of meeting the agency's running costs. If carefully managed, such sensitivities should not prevent a well-considered series of reforms from going forward when the present political crisis eases.

Mythologies and the Peace Process

No lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is possible without a comprehensive resolution of the refugee problem. In the event of a bilateral agreement emerging that fails conclusively to address the refugee issue, according to a former Israeli director of military intelligence, Shlomo Gazit, it

> would only be a matter of time before Israel faced the emergence of a new Palestinian "liberation" movement that called for a real solution for the refugees and for genuine alleviation of their suffering. [The agreement] should offer a clear plan that prevents the refugees from becoming an irredentist element, endangering both Israel and the peace agreement [and]

> the overall timetable of the bilateral agreement must be conditioned on compliance with the refugee timetable.[2]

Gazit has argued that in order to provide a genuine solution to the problem, Israel must insist that certain concrete steps be taken. He suggests that the Palestinian leadership be required to declare publicly that the conflict has come to an end, provide a new definition of the "right of return" that refers only to possible resettlement in the newly established Palestinian entity, and urge the refugees to accept in place of their demand various practical measures that would be offered. For the reasons that have been discussed at length in this book, however, such an outcome seems unlikely to be forthcoming from any credible Palestinian leadership. Though nothing in the Middle East is inconceivable, public abandonment of the principle of the right of return to what is now Israel is not a prospect, nor has a means to bring about such a result been identified.

Since the disastrous events of late 2000 there has been nothing to replace the political basis of the Oslo process. Instead, we have seen a return to fear and insecurity, the degeneration of Palestinian civil society, and the loss of much of the painstaking and farsighted investment by Palestinians and the international community in the Palestinian protostate. Among Palestinians, there is a level of human deprivation in all its dimensions that feeds mythologies born of despair, and little else.

Among many Israelis there is a palpable sense of betrayal of their political and intellectual support for Palestinian rights and aspirations. Some sense that their misgivings about the assumptions underlying the Oslo process have been vindicated. Few voices on either side of Israeli politics have put forward positive or constructive ideas concerning the future direction of their dealings with the Palestinians since the Oslo process finally unraveled.

Most damaging of all, we are witnessing the corrupting influence of violence and the raising of a moral drawbridge between the parties. The present trend, if it is maintained, denies the possibility of solutions being found on the basis of compromise and accommodation derived from mutual confidence and respect.

On the Palestinian side, the minimal attention paid to the refugee issue during most of the 1990s in the policy process was symptomatic of the disconnections within Palestinian society between elites and refugees. It also reflected the shallowness and political expediency of the dealings between the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships that surrounded the Oslo process. The fractured relationship between the Palestinian leadership and its Palestinian audience during the 1990s, and the 1997 crisis in UNRWA, showed, however, that to treat Palestinian refugee mythologies as irrelevant, either to the pursuit of the Palestinian nationalist agenda or to the future of UNRWA, would be unwise. It would also be politically impracticable.

Even were agreement between Israeli and Palestinian leaderships on a wider package deal of mutual concessions on core issues to become possible in the context of peace negotiations, it would be too politically risky for the Palestinian leadership to take, on its own authority, a course of action in direct conflict with present refugee demands. As was observed at the outset of this book, for all its attendant difficulties the future of the relations between Israelis and Palestinians in general cannot be isolated from the internal political dynamics of Palestinian—and Israeli—society.[3]

Looking ahead, both Western governments and the Palestinian leadership will have little choice but to take careful account of the political impact on Palestinian refugees of the policy stances they might adopt in regard to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and in regard to UNRWA. Success in resolving the refugee issue in the longer term will require integrative approaches that go beyond addressing the material and psychological needs and concerns of popular audiences. As mentioned above, such approaches will also need to be linked to changes in wider political frameworks and experiences that shape Palestinian refugee mythologies.

The Future of Palestinian Refugee Mythologies

The situation that faced the Palestinian leadership, Israel, the international community, and UNRWA in the late 1990s was shaped to a very large extent by political mythologies of Palestinian refugees that were proving to be highly resistant to change. Those perceptions concerned not only their rights as refugees, but also the responsibilities of others toward them. The prospect of change, including within the role of UNRWA, posed important challenges to certain intensely held collective memories that lay at the core of refugee identity.

It is difficult to see how that political situation might evolve over the coming decade. No Palestinian leadership can afford to ignore the ambiguity, contradiction, and lack of consensus within Palestinian society. Palestinian governments, political leaders, and ordinary individuals confronting a range of existential pressures, organizational weaknesses, and political instability may not possess, or even always strive to achieve, policies that are sufficiently coherent and well articulated to reshape popular thinking and views.

It is unclear what long-term effects upon Palestinian society, including refugees, will flow from exposure to nongovernmental organizations pursuing agendas ranging from human rights to social and economic development. As in other parts of the Middle East, the cumulative impact on popular mythologies of opposing viewpoints expressed through alternative media outlets including satellite television, videos, cassettes, and the Internet are still to be measured.

There is uncertainty regarding the extent to which Israel may restore, in due course, effective Palestinian control in the West Bank and Gaza and thereby establish the basis of a sovereign Palestinian state. The circumstances under which such a development takes place, and the quality of subsequent dealings between the two states, will influence political attitudes among both Palestinians and Israelis to the refugee issue.

As was the case during the Oslo period, the determination of the Palestinian leadership to secure the establishment of a sovereign state will lead it to pursue security and political agendas that may or may not prove compatible in the longer term with Palestinian popular expectations and mythologies. The probity, efficiency, and other qualities of the post-Arafat Palestinian leadership will affect significantly its capacity to cope with such pressures.

The capacity for change in regard to refugee mythologies will be limited in scope by political, social, and economic factors such as those mentioned above. The complex interaction of those factors, in the Palestinian context at least, also suggests that the timing of the process of change cannot be externally or artificially controlled to any great extent. Memories may eventually be reconstructed and mythologies may in time be reshaped in the Palestinian context, as they have been to some extent in Israel, but only through processes whose driving forces lie within Palestinian society and that are an outcome of its own political experiences.

For both Palestinian and Israeli leaderships, moreover, the extent to which political decisions that might reshape existing mythologies can be transformed into practical outcomes is questionable. There is a wealth of experience on the Israeli side with the political challenges of acting in the absence of domestic consensus, and at the same time, some notable failures of political will in that regard. The consequences of those failures for the peace process have been calamitous.

Arafat's failure to manage constructively the political issues and relationships that were key to the destiny of the Palestinian Authority has been a disaster for the Palestinian people. However, the capacity of the Palestinian leadership to enter binding commitments, under present circumstances at least, is highly uncertain. The forging of a consensus that might make durable cooperation rather than conflict with Israel possible awaits an end to Israeli intrusions into everyday Palestinian life, most notably through the presence of its security forces and settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. It also will depend to some extent, as discussed below, on the further development of Palestinian democratic institutions.

Peace with Each Other, or from Each Other?

The course of events during the 1990s showed that if Palestinians are to be asked to give enduring effect to decisions that impact on issues central to

their sense of identity, they will need to be more directly involved in the making of those decisions. Among a Palestinian society lacking cohesion and under stress, and with diverse material interests and evident political differences, narrowly focused moves to abandon popular mythologies such as the right of return and replace them with scholarly reinterpretations or political compromises will be interpreted by many Palestinians as seeking to undermine the quasi-sacred foundations of their society.

To open the way politically to revisions of refugee mythologies such as the right of return, there has to be a sustained effort by the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships to address core political issues. The ideas that were enunciated by U.S. president Bill Clinton in his final days in office, and that were taking shape in the negotiations between Palestinian and Israeli officials and their support teams at Taba in late 2000, provide the optimal starting point for that process to resume.[4] That package is unlikely to be taken up again, unfortunately, without the purposeful use of both carrots and sticks by the United States.

A meaningful peace process will require the restoration of a credible Palestinian negotiating partner that is equipped materially and politically to uphold its obligations and that demonstrates without ambiguity it has the will to do so. It will require political stability, restraint, and commitment on the Israeli side to political risk-taking that was not evident when it was needed most during the Oslo period. It will not be possible without a substantial swing in Israeli political sentiment and leadership away from an illusory search for security through power. Israelis, no less than Palestinians, must deny terrorism its stranglehold on the process of rebuilding constructive dealings between both sides.

No matter how much both Israelis and Palestinians might yearn for peace from each other, rather than with each other, security for both sides will be an ongoing process of mutual engagement. It cannot be a finite outcome encapsulated in a key event or instrument. Coping with conflicting mythologies, unrequited or otherwise, is bound to be one aspect of that process.

Accommodations based on mutual interest, constantly reviewed, discussed, agreed, and argued over; strong defense including deterrence capabilities; agreements sustained in practice mostly by political, economic, and social engagement; respect for human rights and dignity within countries and in dealings between them; and continuous dialogue at government, security agency, and nongovernmental levels provide a more sustainable basis for peace in the Middle East context than formal agreements. In David Shipler's words:

> Whatever happens in war or diplomacy, whatever territory is won or lost, whatever accommodations or compromises are finally made, the future

> guarantees that Arabs and Jews will remain close neighbours in this weary land, entangled in each other's fears. They will not escape from one another. They will not find peace, in treaties or in victories. They will find it, if they find it at all, by looking into each other's eyes.[5]

Treaties in the Arab-Israeli context are important ways of articulating key agreements to which the parties themselves and third parties may refer. They require precision in their wording and common understanding of the obligations they record. But so far as their benefit in practice is concerned, if devoid of comprehensive engagement and some degree of personal trust between the parties, in Charles de Gaulle's memorable phrase, treaties, like roses, will only last while they last.[6]

Multifaceted, engagement-oriented approaches at leadership levels for dealing with friends and adversaries alike have formed part of the inter-Arab political experience. They have also operated, mostly unacknowledged, throughout the history of leadership-level dealings between Israel and Jordan, and to some extent in regard to aspects of Israel's dealings with several other Arab states in the Persian Gulf and North Africa. Provided engagement achieved practical results, it would be accepted by many Palestinians as part of the routine role expected of their leaders—although there would be those who would insist that the rights of Palestinians under international law should not be the subject of bargaining within such an approach.

Differing mutual expectations between Israelis and Palestinians in the context of a peace process complicate such an approach. For Israelis the political challenges associated with winning popular acceptance of the perceived risk-taking of the generally inconclusive, sometimes ambiguous and often frustrating processes that regional realities require would be formidable, even under relatively benign security conditions. Israeli leadership, and its strategic thinking, has always had a firm basis in realist approaches to the wider world, although too often perhaps at the expense of its appreciation of the human dimensions of the security challenges Israel faces. In the absence of genuine warmth in dealings with neighboring Arab states, as the comments by Shlomo Gazit mentioned earlier suggest, many Israelis would see any outcome on the refugee issue that did not openly declare the abandonment of the right of return by the Palestinians as a step toward Israel's destruction. Israelis would not be easily persuaded that reality points overwhelmingly in the other direction.

There is very little practical risk to Israel's existence as a sovereign Jewish state posed by Palestinian refugees alone. Simply put, so long as Israel remains determined to be a Jewish state, it will not permit Palestinian refugees to return in such numbers as would undermine its fundamental character. Israel cannot be forced to act against its core national interests.

Meanwhile, no major Arab country would see its national interests—including interests in positive bilateral relations with the United States—served by attempting to press the refugee issue beyond occasional rhetorical indulgence.

At the political level the ongoing refusal of a right of return to Israel of Palestinian refugees has negative consequences for Israeli and U.S. interests within the wider region. It is one of several factors limiting the prospects for bringing about an end to the Arab-Israeli dispute. It is part of the negative imagery with which the United States has to contend in the international struggle against terrorism, and in mobilizing support for its actions against Saddam Hussein. It is an embarrassment for Jordan and Egypt and a factor for instability in Lebanon. Movement by Israel on the right of return issue would therefore be a valuable negotiating coin with Washington, and with Arab states such as Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. But decisions on Israel's stance involve politically sensitive calculations that only Israelis can make.

Ideally, a right of return for refugees to Israel proper would be acknowledged by Israel, on the clear understanding that it would be applied under conditions over which Israel would have effective control. If that ideal could not be achieved, at least the issue of the right of return to Israel would have to be seen among Palestinians to be an ongoing issue, open for negotiation among other elements of a larger package of outcomes.

With formal recognition by Israel of the right to return to Israel, Palestinian refugees—and the Palestinian leadership on their behalf—would then be in a position to make decisions about their own future by considering a range of alternatives that would not carry with them an obligation to renounce the refugees' perceived rights and identity. Depending on the priorities of the Palestinian leadership of the day, the rate and manner of *implementation* of a formally acknowledged right of return to Israel could be bargained in the negotiating process against such national issues as territory, settlements, delineation of sovereignty within Jerusalem, border controls, and water. With its political and moral authority considerably underpinned by having secured the principle involved, the Palestinian leadership would be in a reasonable position to shape the direction of debate on that and other issues within the Palestinian refugee and nonrefugee community and among Arab countries as a whole.

However, just as Palestinians will not formally surrender their perceived rights, it is highly unlikely for the foreseeable future that Israel would openly acknowledge a right of return to Israel proper. At most, it might be willing to see the refugee issue remaining on the table, essentially unaddressed, and perhaps with some expansion of family reunion programs. Under those circumstances, refugees would resist any moves by the Palestinian leadership to engage in the sort of engagement and bargaining process

described above. It would be seen to be ultimately at the expense of their rights as well as their interests. Establishing and sustaining political momentum for a comprehensive and durable peace package in such a situation—among both Palestinians and Israelis witnessing the Palestinian reaction to such an approach—would be extremely difficult.

Palestinian Refugee Empowerment

If there can be little reason to expect early movement toward a positive and constructive approach at the political level for dealing with the return issue, the creation of an alternative future for refugees takes on added importance. In no sense, of course, should that task be seen as a substitute for seeking the resolution of the political issues outstanding between the two sides. It would, however, be a complementary and, I believe, a necessary part of that process.

Ideally, there would also be increased empowerment of refugees—in the sense of being able to be effective participants in decisions affecting their lives and more effective in representing their interests in those negotiations with Israel. But is a stronger popular sense of empowerment among refugees a serious possibility?

On balance, despite their disruptive capacity to political calculations and their numerical significance, refugees in general seem likely to remain the least politically potent part of Palestinian society. They are socially and economically removed from the Palestinian elite. They lack its access to privileged opportunities in business and in public political life. They certainly lack the political capacity to bring the rigors of public accountability to bear on the leadership of Yasser Arafat and those closest to him. Their family structures are more authoritarian, their education levels are lower, and their levels of economic insecurity are higher than their middle-class nonrefugee counterparts.

Political empowerment for refugees may be a first step toward changing elements of that situation in the long term, but it is a process that can only proceed in step with internally driven changes in Palestinian society more generally. Elitism and neopatrimonial forms of political organization remain deeply disempowering phenomena for Palestinians in general. Without economic security and access to the broad suite of advantages enjoyed by the Palestinian elite, the establishment of improved electoral practices and constitutional reforms would most likely prove to be largely irrelevant to daily experience for most refugees.

Refugee political activists are vocal and well organized, but numerically they are only a small part of the refugee population as a whole. And the political direction in which the activist stratum is headed concentrates

mainly on the reaffirmation of traditional aspirations and political concerns. Empowerment would not necessarily lead, in the short term at least, to greater pragmatism or impact on the part of refugees or their advocates in regard to their distinctive interests.

Moreover, during the 1990s there was a sufficient gap in practice between refugee mythologies on one side and the Palestinian Authority's public and private positions on the peace process on the other, for the two phenomena to coexist. Despite their apparent contradictions, neither the Palestinian Authority nor its Palestinian critics appeared to see their dealings with each other in zero-sum terms. The Palestinian leadership was content to allow the two currents to run in parallel, at least until the Oslo process fell apart. Until that point was reached, the system was managed in a manner that produced benefits to key players on all sides, albeit at the cost of policy coherence. It would require a different Palestinian leadership style and vastly different political circumstances for any other approach to apply in the future.

In addition to the continued pursuit of constitutional and other political reforms, therefore, it is necessary to approach the issue of empowerment and its objectives in the refugee context using a still broader perspective. Doing so effectively will demand an accurate understanding of the dynamics of Palestinian society and politics, and preparedness to work creatively within that framework—which, it must be added, is evolving as a consequence of generational change and other factors.

Realistically, if perhaps not ideally in all respects, empowerment would not set out to challenge existing mythologies and political and social structures directly. Instead it would form part of a wider process whose cumulative effect would be to reduce the perceived relevance of established mythologies and narratives to current refugee experience. In short, the challenge in the Palestinian refugee context would be to present refugees with real choices, which directly affected refugees' immediate experiences and needs, while managing existing mythologies and ongoing experiences and the pressures for continuity of collective memories. Though unlikely to be abandoned, those mythologies might gradually become less dominant when confronted by new experiences of constructive dealings with Israel, and with the Palestinian political leadership, at individual and governmental levels.

Depending on the particular circumstances of individual refugees in various locations, choices that could be made available to refugees could include, in the case of refugees in Gaza and the West Bank, joining regularized and ongoing guest labor programs in Israel. In addition to being on a sufficient scale largely to replace the present inflow of foreign workers into Israel, the implementation of the programs would need to be carefully designed so as to remove the daily indignities endured by the vast majority of refugees at designated entry points into Israel. If high-technology solutions

cannot be found to permit such arrangements for daily entry, some form of temporary residence permits would be desirable.

Although such programs would involve risk-taking on Israel's part because of the enhanced opportunities they may provide for terrorist attacks, regularized but essentially unhindered movement of Palestinian labor into Israel (and of course within the West Bank and Gaza en route to Israel) would primarily benefit low-income Palestinians. It would significantly and immediately alter the economic situation and outlook for the vast majority of Palestinian refugee families. To that extent it would provide a partial basis for restoring more stable political dealings between the two sides at the leadership level.

There could be considerably expanded family reunion opportunities in Israel for older refugees. Refugees who were 15 years old in 1948 are now in their seventies. There are probably fewer than 30,000 refugees in that category in Lebanon, for example. In addition to the deplorable humanitarian aspects of their situation, they pose neither security nor demographic threats.

There could also be enhanced migration opportunities for younger refugees, especially in Lebanon, attracted by the prospect of a better future beyond the region than any likely to be achieved in a comprehensive deal struck between Israel and the Palestinian Authority or as the outcome of negotiations between Israel and the Lebanese government. Israel, the United States, and other Western countries could perhaps consider an arrangement whereby refugees admitted as residents under an expanded family reunion scheme, or those entering Israel from Lebanon under long-term guest worker arrangements, would be immediately eligible upon entry to be processed as potential immigrants to interested Western countries. Those refugees who applied would be subject to meeting educational and security criteria that could be largely dealt with before entry into Israel.

Settlement costs and security concerns could be minimized by introducing training schemes through private voluntary organizations for those seeking the necessary qualifications to apply for the program. Overall coordination of such a scheme could perhaps be undertaken by the International Organization for Migration.

Western countries, while remaining mindful of the need to take an economically rational approach to sustaining what would have to be a long-term program, could help by creating incentives for Israel to support it. They could do so, for example, by providing undertakings to the international coordinating agency to make every effort to accept collectively the entry, as migrants, of equivalent or greater numbers of refugees to those entering Israel under family reunion arrangements. While most neighboring Arab countries (except perhaps in the case of Lebanon) would be unlikely for political reasons to give such an arrangement their public support, many would privately welcome it.

UNRWA's overall capacity to provide high-quality education and health services on a sustainable basis would be improved as the numbers of refugees registered with the agency stabilized or fell. Although the focus of its education, vocational training, and health programs would not change, those programs would indirectly support both migration and guest labor flows, as they did in terms of the movement of Palestinians to Arab countries in the Persian Gulf prior to the 1990s.

There are of course a number of issues that make it difficult to bring these suggestions into policy focus. In the post–September 11, 2001, situation in the United States, and with concerns about migration a growing political issue in Europe, such an approach obviously is not currently feasible. It would also be desirable, as mentioned below, to avoid highlighting the approach as a policy initiative—but if the initiative were not in the public domain, then seeking international support for a coordinated approach and securing funding for the program could be awkward. There would also be Palestinians and their supporters who would object to the potential of such a program to weaken Palestinian identity and collective memory. They would be entitled also to be concerned that it might deflect attention from the right of return of the refugees as a matter of principle and of international law.

These are serious issues, requiring careful consideration and sensitive political management. However none of them should be insurmountable if the Palestinian refugees themselves are attracted to the benefits that would be on offer, and if the refugees are able to exploit the opportunities without prejudice to their beliefs. Empowerment of this nature, while difficult, is nevertheless a more realistic goal in the short term than an externally promoted remaking of Palestinian society and politics. Whether it would impede the internal processes of change within that society, or in due course hasten the pace of change, can only be a matter for speculation.

The best approach to securing Palestinian refugee support for moves in the directions I am suggesting would be to create a groundswell effect among refugees that could be pursued without prejudice to their individual political convictions. It would be helpful, in that regard, to minimize the use of formal announcements of policy initiatives by Israel or by third parties, especially in the context of the peace process. While cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian security authorities would be essential to the implementation of such schemes, they would be best made available without requiring formal Palestinian leadership endorsement of them, or making them conditional upon Palestinian commitment to achieving other political or security outcomes as part of a balanced deal. Such outcomes may be sought, of course, in other contexts.

It is conceivable that a migration program to Western countries could be introduced at a riper moment over the coming years to supplement a

regularized program of labor access to Israel. Over a decade, and especially if those who were accepted under a migration program were permitted to sponsor family members to join them, a migration program or perhaps a combined guest labor and migration program to Europe and elsewhere would see a significant reduction of the refugee presence in Lebanon. There would be strong demand, albeit perhaps not publicly expressed, in Gaza and the West Bank for similar arrangements based on the Lebanese model, and that demand should be accommodated wherever possible.

Under no circumstances should outcomes involving a migration or guest labor component be presented as the consequence of a defeat for refugee aspirations. And yet, despite its obvious political sensitivities for many refugees, by allowing refugees themselves to determine their priorities *without prejudice to their mythologies,* including that of their right at some stage to return, a new and more promising reality may well emerge. Within that reality, the importance attached to existing concerns would, in practice, be accorded a lower level of priority than is possible under present circumstances. Core refugee mythologies would continue to be expressed. Some refugees would find ways to enter and remain in Israel. But for many refugees, regularized labor programs and migration programs such as those described above would be likely to become, fairly quickly, the focus of their individual future. The problem would be in managing the demand for such opportunities and avoiding additional pressures on refugees, particularly in Lebanon, to leave host countries for domestic political reasons.

The national issue of the return of refugees as a matter of right would not disappear. It would justifiably remain a prominent and legitimate part of Israeli-Palestinian peace process negotiations, Palestinian politics, and the politics of neighboring Arab countries. However, if the approach discussed above were to be combined with a serious effort to condition the political environment by addressing other major concerns, the right of return issue would probably be defused sufficiently for political leaders to reestablish a positive environment for negotiations at the national level. Moving ahead from that point it may be possible ultimately to develop a viable basis for reasonably predictable, positive, and constructive dealings between sovereign states.

The beliefs and rights of refugees *as individuals* may not be capable of being addressed substantively in negotiations between states. Addressed however as a practical matter of the interests of states concerning the numbers of people entering and leaving Israel, or agreements between states regarding their citizens buying, selling, and receiving compensation for property, there is a reasonable prospect at some stage of agreements being achieved at the *national* level between Israel, a Palestinian state, and other Arab countries.

And therein, over an extended period, may lie the effective outcome of the refugee issue. It would not necessarily represent a just outcome in the

eyes of all parties. Refugee mythologies concerning their rights as individuals would persist. But whereas refugee mythologies would lose their overall political impact as other priorities came to dominate popular—including refugee—agendas, interests-based agreements between states that were supported by sustained mutual engagement would be likely to grow increasingly durable over time. Israelis would learn to live with some refugees or their descendants returning actually or symbolically to Israel proper, and yet they would remain secure as a Jewish state. Israel would continue to struggle to win acceptance within the region as a distinctive entity, but its right to exist would no longer be perceived in the Arab world mostly through the lenses of the Palestinian refugee tragedy.

Final Thoughts: Security, Mythologies, and Tribal Delusions

Although the path to peace in the Middle East lies through fulfilling the need for security for both Israelis and Palestinians, the key political challenge is for leaderships to recognize the linkage between security, politics, and mythologies. Both sides need to accept responsibility for building domestic political support for the compromises and adjustments to thinking about politics and security that building a peaceful future will entail.

The possibility of instituting moves toward cooperative security between Israel and the Palestinians, and within the wider region, remains open. Deliberate efforts to lower Palestinian expectations of what peace might bring them cannot, however, ultimately be reconciled with the need of Israelis and Palestinians alike for security. Peace will not be achieved, and terrorism will not be defeated, in a situation where most Palestinians feel betrayed, punished for having the misfortune to be the weaker party, and unsympathetic (to put it mildly) to suggestions of further compromise or confidence-building with Israelis.

Building a secure future is not a matter of agreeing to percentages and schedules for the next steps in a peace process. Neither is it a matter of creating—as Shimon Peres sought to do—the illusion of an early resolution to the conflict based on the development of shared economic interests. At this stage, and for many years to come, fundamental issues of identity, collective memories, and imbalances of power will remain to be resolved between Israel and the Palestinians. Security from terrorist attacks and the strengthening of Palestinian capacity to prevent such attacks will also remain critically important and highly problematic issues for both sides.

Facing random terrorist attacks at present, members of the Israeli public are increasingly prone to political paralysis and self-doubt about their domestic and external situation. And whereas the majority of Palestinians

do not appear inclined to depart in large numbers from their traditional, nationalistic, and largely secular political orientation, that situation is changing in disturbing directions.[7]

At a popular level, resistance to the use of terror against Israelis, never strong to begin with, has weakened. Even though the overwhelming majority of Palestinians want peace, terrorist acts are seen among many Palestinians as a tolerable—sometimes an appropriate—means of responding to the hopelessness of their situation. A once-promising relationship has reverted into mistrust and vindictiveness. Everyone involved in the present violence has been degraded by it.

The terrorist violence that is being inflicted at random on individual Israelis under the scenario we are witnessing is unconscionable. It has destroyed the political basis of the Oslo process. It has also removed—as some of its perpetrators intended—the political legitimacy of the Palestinian national movement under Arafat, at least so far as most Israelis and several key political figures in the United States are concerned.

Among the Palestinians, it is the most vulnerable, especially the refugees, who are suffering to a disproportionate extent from the political and economic consequences of that situation. It is among the second and third generations of refugees, recently reminded of the fiftieth anniversary of their historical tragedy, that some of the strongest voices of support for terrorist actions can be heard. There is no shortage of political aspirants keen to place the cost of their ambitions on the shoulders of such audiences, and to perpetuate dreams and hatreds that cannot be satiated.

Most Palestinians have lost hope. That does not mean, however, that they are therefore more willing to accept demands and impositions that deny them their right to dignity, both as individuals and as a nation. Superior power, too often used unwisely to pursue narrowly focused political agendas that extend beyond legitimate security concerns, cannot provide a secure refuge for ordinary Israelis from that reality.

Durable compromises, if they can be made, will come as a result of negotiations between political leaders who are confident of themselves, and who are prepared and able to present the rationale for such compromises with equal confidence to their audiences. To succeed against formidable odds they will require ongoing support, encouragement, risk-taking, and creative advice from one another and from external parties, particularly the United States. It must be advice and support that reflects an understanding of the constraints they each genuinely face, including political mythologies.

Whether Palestinians and Israelis fulfill or fall short of their commitments to each other, whether or not outside parties are able to lend meaningful assistance, and whether or not existing mythologies are overtaken by other priorities and changing experiences, ultimately the task of national leadership cannot be shirked. Palestinians, and Palestinian refugees in

particular, deserve better than the cards history has dealt them. The responsibility and political burden of both Israeli and Palestinian leaders is to see and understand the many levels of their conflict, to respect their mythologies but to avoid being blinded by them in coming to terms with each other, and to rebuild together what they have lost.

Notes

Chapter-opening epigraphs are from the following sources: Mark A. Heller and Sari Nusseibeh, *No Trumpets, No Drums: A Two-State Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991), pp. 86–87; and Mahmoud Darwish, "Some Roses Less (Wardun Akaal)," 1986, translated by Tania Nasser, reprinted by permission.

1. Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 1–6.

2. Shlomo Gazit, *The Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1995), p. 33.

3. See Chapter 1 and Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post–Cold War Era* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991), pp. 60–61. See also Robert Bowker, *Beyond Peace: The Search for Security in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996), p. 5.

4. Minutes of the comments by President Clinton at a meeting with Israeli and Palestinian representatives at the White House on 23 December 2000. *Ha'aretz*, 31 December 2000.

5. David Shipler, *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), p. 16.

6. "Treaties, you see, are like young girls and roses: they last while they last (*ça dure ce que ça dure*)." Charles de Gaulle, Elysée Palace, Paris, 2 July 1963.

7. Khalil Shikaki, "Palestinians Divided," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 1 (January–February 2002).

Acronyms

ADCOM	Advisory Commission (UNRWA)
CEC	Central Emergency Committee
CERMOC	Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain (Paris)
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
ESM	Economic Survey Mission
EU	European Union
FAFO	Institute for Applied Social Science (Norway)
GNP	gross national product
GUPW	General Union of Palestinian Women
IPCRI	Israel-Palestine Centre for Research and Information
IRO	International Refugee Organization
LSU	Local Staff Union (UNRWA)
MRC	Medical Relief Committees (Union of Palestine)
NGO	nongovernmental organization
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PIP	Peace Implementation Programme (UNRWA)
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PNC	Palestine National Council
RAO	Refugee Affairs Officer
RWG	Refugee Working Group
UN	United Nations
UNCCP	United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine
UNDOF	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRP	United Nations Disaster Relief Project
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISPAL	United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine
UNLU	Unified Leadership of the Uprising
UNRPR	United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSCO	United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
UYAC	Union of Youth Activities Centres
WHO	World Health Organization

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About the Book

Encompassing history, politics, and political culture, Robert Bowker explores the impact of Palestinian refugee mythologies on the potential settlement of the conflict with Israel.

Bowker examines the nature of Palestinian refugee mythologies and their social and political underpinnings. He also discusses how these mythologies and the manipulation of them are key elements in the relationship between the refugees and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

A fair and balanced treatment of a complex subject, *Palestinian Refugees* grapples with fundamental issues of Palestinian identity in the search for peace, as well as core questions about the role and identity of international organizations in the Middle East.

During his more than thirty-year career as a Middle East specialist with the Australian government, **Robert Bowker** has served in Saudi Arabia and Syria, as Australian ambassador to Jordan and Tunisia, as a senior official of UNRWA in Gaza and Jerusalem, and as director of the Middle East section of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Dr. Bowker is author of *Beyond Peace: The Search for Security in the Middle East.*